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ABSTRACT

This case study examines the problems faced by traditional-age students moving to a community to attend a community college without residence halls, and explores why these students have less academic success and greater attrition than similar students living in their home community. After a review of literature, the paper describes a qualitative study of a single site in the northeastern United States, where students and employees were interviewed in order to understand what obstacles existed, and if the college provided any support services for this population. Additional analysis was done on student attrition rates and grades. Results showed that the obstacles most likely to inhibit student persistence were loneliness (especially in the first semester), budgeting issues, housing problems, security concerns, and the inability to commit to the local college or community. While community colleges are not bound to provide specific services to this population, they should have an interest in the retention and subsequent success of these students. The document discusses how pervasive these problems are, their effects on students and colleges, and suggests services that might be provided to increase retention of this population. Appended are the Student Living in Collegetown Booklet, transcripts of student and employee interviews, and 1995-1997 retention figures. Contains 98 references. (AS)

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ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS OF FRESHMEN ATTENDING A DISTANT, NON-RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
School of Education in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

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ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS OF FRESHMEN ATTENDING A DISTANT, NON-RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Stephen Richard Catt, Ed.D.

University of Pittsburgh, 1998

Advisor: Dr. David W. Champagne David W. Champagne

Over eighty percent of community colleges do not have residence halls, nor do they provide any residential support systems. However, some community colleges might need to provide these services for students as the regions from which they recruit expand. Increasing numbers of students are attending community colleges from distances greater than are easily commuted to attend daily classes. Obstacles that occur for traditional age students attempting to live on their own when attending a community college are accentuated when support systems are minimized or not offered at all. Not providing college sponsored housing is one decision that is usually fiscally sound and easily justified. Not providing services that could assist students' adjustment to college life and a new environment might provide additional stress that contributes to attrition, eliminating the likelihood that these students will attain their academic goals.

Through a qualitative study of a single site, students and employees were interviewed in order to understand what obstacles existed and if the college provided any support services for this population. By separating interview comments into themes, various truths about these students emerged. Additional analysis included

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attrition rates and grades of this population as compared to their counterparts who live within a reasonable commute from campus.

The obstacles most likely to inhibit student persistence were loneliness (especially in the first semester), budgeting issues, housing problems, security concerns, and the inability to commit to the college or local community. Those obstacles pose substantial difficulties for students struggling with both academic pressures and adjusting to a new independent lifestyle. Critical findings of this study concern the obligation of community colleges in situations similar to this. As community colleges expand their recruitment area beyond reasonable commuting distances, what obligations do they have to students deciding to attend full time and move closer to the campus?

DEDICATION

To community college students everywhere who all have potential to excel, their success is the truth and our future.

To professors, theorists, and practitioners who challenge me to seek truth, express it knowledgeably, and act upon it.

To family, friends, and pets who encourage and support me to reach my greatest potential while seeking truth.

Thank you.

Love means working for the well being of the whole being of every being, including your own being, and so pleasing the Supreme Being.
(Wheatley, 1984)

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I. INTRODUCTION

Statement of the problem

Traditional age students moving into a specific community, in order to attend a community college without residence halls, have less academic success and greater attrition than similar students living in their home community.

Introduction

Community colleges without residence halls enroll traditional age students who live on their own, apart from a primary family unit. Sometimes these students, overwhelmed by the combination of life challenges and academic work, either leave college prematurely or are academically unsuccessful. This situation occurs more often to these students than their counterparts of the same age living with a family unit. Community colleges are not bound to provide specific services to this population, but they do have an interest in the retention and subsequent success of these students.

How pervasive these problems are, and suggestions as to what services might be provided to these students, were studied at a specific community college. The college is located in the northeastern part of the United States, forty miles from a major urban area, and in a suburban area serving both rural and suburban populations. This study might have implications for any community college serving students beyond commutable distances.

Research questions

- Do young college students living on their own while attending non-residential community college have a higher rate of academic problems in their first year than other young students within the same setting?

- What are the problems young students living on their own encounter?
- Does this community college provide special services for this population?
- What are these services, if any are offered?
- Do young students living on their own while attending a community college perceive their needs are being met?

Delimitations of the study

Limiting this study to one site while studying only one academic year provides a snapshot perspective of the issue. However, examining the subject in a qualitative manner allowed for rich, in-depth approaches that give feeling and meaning to the research. Decisions were made to limit the venue because this type of study required closer scrutiny on the part of one researcher. A small number of students were interviewed because only those who fit precise criteria were included in this study. Students, especially those who stopped out, were a challenge to find and convince to participate. The sample of students could be more complete, but the quality of data obtained from those interviewed adequately described the topic being studied.

Limitations of the study

As an administrator of the college being studied, and also a graduate student, there were ethical considerations encountered during the study that could not have been predicted. For instance, parent interviews were originally planned but first contacts with them were so unproductive and unfriendly, that a decision was made not to continue or include them. If pressed, parents may have damaged the reputation of the college through complaints and poor publicity among their communities. Adjusting for this meant that the study became focused on student and employee perspectives. There were also legal restrictions on some of the police records and criminal activities that were to be investigated. As a result, only public records reported in local media were examined. For similar ethical considerations as encountered with parents, landlords and owners of rental units were not contacted or interviewed. The college administration gave permission to study students and interview employees. Investigating community members and creating any implication that the college could control students outside campus was discouraged. There was more information that could have been investigated through data generated by the computer center, but that was difficult to obtain. The timing of this study coincided with turnover of employees and upgrades within that department, the only access to specific numbers In spite of these complications, information obtained provided adequate background to ground this qualitative investigation.

Definition of terms

- Attrition- student leaving a college or university before the student's academic goals are realized (e.g. such as graduation, successful transfer, improved job skills.)
- Community college- a public comprehensive two year institution offering associate degrees that has an open door policy of enrollment, reasonable costs, and serves the community; first defined in the 1947 President's Commission of Higher Education.
- Commuting distance- Cohen (1986) defined comfortable travel to campus by vehicle or public transportation as within twenty-five miles. For the purposes of this study, students coming from homes forty miles or greater will be used to determine those most likely to move nearer to the campus.
- Direct-entry student- a student who enters college within one year of graduating from high school. Conversely, "delayed-entry students enter a college more than one year after graduating from high school" (Brann, 1995, p. 2).
- First generation students- the first person in the history of the nuclear family to

attend college (London, 1996).

- *in loco parentis*- Black's Law Dictionary defines *in loco parentis* as: "In the place of a parent; instead of a parent; charged factitiously with a parent's rights, duties and responsibilities" (1990, p. 787).
- Open door enrollment policy- all adults, eighteen years and older, who have either a high school diploma or a General Education Development Certificate (GED) are admissible to a college. Remediation may still be required to enter specific college level courses and some specialized academic programs.
- Retention- students maintaining their enrollment and progressing toward their academic goals.
- Stop out- a student who leaves college before his or her academic goals are completed. The student may return to an institute of higher education at some time in the future to complete those goals, complete different goals, or not return at all.
- Suburban community college- three categories of community colleges exist; rural, suburban, and urban. Suburban community colleges are typically one main campus, perhaps one or more sites off campus, and usually without residence halls (Katsinas, 1993).
- Traditional age- the age of a typical college student as defined in the recent past, a freshman would be eighteen or nineteen years old.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

History and purpose of community colleges

Many community colleges are young institutions with emerging policies affecting students in ways that are not fully understood, especially when compared with the abundance of literature written about universities and four year colleges. "Educators agree that community colleges are unique in American higher education" (Helfgot & Culp, 1995, p. 1). The populations attracted to community colleges are also new, very different from the color, age, creed, and gender studied in previous decades. These institutions need assistance in establishing a body of literature which helps administrators and other stakeholders understand who they are serving, what is occurring now, and how services can be improved. Community college students are timely subjects for research because they are a constantly changing and little known population within higher education. There are gaps in our knowledge that are only now beginning to be filled with something more than observational guesswork. Pascarella, in a recent article written for the ACPA journal About Campus, asks educational researchers to turn their attention to these long-ignored institutions in which over a third of American college students attend (Pascarella, 1997).

There is a revolution in American higher education that has been accelerating since the beginning of this century. Two year junior colleges, created for various reasons in the early 1900's, have developed into technical colleges and community colleges. America's fascination with these relatively new institutions expands beyond increased opportunities for the typical eighteen year old white male. Indeed, this revolution has occurred throughout the adult population and is predicted to continue as the occupations of our society become more complex. Presently, over fifty percent of all persons receiving post secondary education in the United States begin their studies at one of 1,250 community colleges (Cohen, 1996). It is for this reason that increased research and attention should be focused upon this segment of higher education.

Two year colleges began formally at the beginning of the twentieth century for a number of noble, and ignoble, reasons. Three motivations that began this new movement were the need for workers trained to operate the nation's expanding industries, a lengthened period of adolescence, and the drive for social equality (Cohen, 1996). Although on-the-job learning through apprenticeship was possible, Americans were beginning to trust more in an external,authority that legitimized a sanctioned, external process. Junior colleges provided an implied uniformity that educators and employers understood. Thus higher education took on a new role in the industrialized age, a role that the existing institutions were ill prepared to take.

Among those with less altruistic reasons for promoting a junior college were a few prominent educators in the late 1800's and early 1900's who wanted their senior institutions to abandon the freshman and sophomore year students to a new institution. Henry Tappan of the University of Michigan in 1851, William Mitchell of the University of Georgia in 1859, and William Folwell of the University of Minnesota in 1869 each stated that their institutions needed to relinquish lower division preparatory work in order to become true research institutions (Cohen, 1996). "Prominent educators sought a new kind of "buffer institution" that could segregate poorly prepared students from established universities and colleges... sending on only the best students" (Cohen, 1996, p. 7). These attitudes, expressed by leaders of the established university system at the time, allowed a new type of institution to be born. Combined with an increased social demand for accessible education, the short-sightedness of universities gave away this opportunity to junior colleges which began to flourish in the United States.

The first two year institution, founded in 1901, was Joliet Junior College in Chicago Illinois (Vaughn, 1996). Although Joliet Junior College signaled the beginning of an important movement in higher education, debates on the direction the movement would take were just beginning. By 1920, over two hundred junior colleges were established throughout the United States (Cohen, p. 15, 1996). Nonetheless, educational debates ensued through the 1920's and 1930's between proponents of an expanded high school plan and a two year college system. Public school systems proposed a 6-4-4 plan, six years of elementary education, four years of junior high school, and four years of high school education which included thirteenth and fourteenth years (Cohen, p. 12, 1996). This debate continued until 1947 when President Truman appointed a special commission to examine the higher education system.

The 1947 President's Commission on Higher Education called for institutions which could provide easy access to two years of study beyond high school (Cohen, 1982). This commission suggested a change from junior colleges to more comprehensive community colleges.

> The time has come to make education through the fourteenth grade available in the same way that high school education is now available. This means that tuition-free education should be available in public institutions to all youth for the traditional freshman and sophomore years or for the traditional 2-year college course. To achieve this, it will be necessary to develop much more extensively than at present, such opportunities as are now provided in local communities by the 2-year college, community institute, community college, or institute of arts

> and sciences. The name used does not matter, though community college seems to describe these schools best; the important matter is that the services they perform be recognized and vastly extended. Such institutions make post-high-school education available to a much larger percentage of young people than otherwise could afford it. Indeed, as discussed in the volume of this Commission's report, "Organizing Higher Education," such community colleges probably will have to carry a large part of the responsibility for expanding opportunities in higher education. (President's Commission on Higher Education, 1947, p. 15-16)

"During the 1950's and 1960's, the term *junior college* was applied more often to the lower-division branches of private universities and to two-year colleges supported by churches or organized independently, while *community colleges* came gradually to be used for comprehensive, publicly supported institutions. By the 1970's, the term *community college* was usually applied to both types" (Cohen, 1982, p. 5). The expanded functions of two year colleges included both technical preparation and liberal education to students not previously admitted to college. This increased access enabled men from lower social classes, more women, and minorities to begin matriculating into higher education.

The principle purpose of community colleges is unquestionably to help students learn and reach their educational objectives (Palmer, 1990). This mission is unique to institutions of higher education when examined more closely. Not only do these institutions invite all to become college students, regardless of age, background, or SAT score, but they are also mandated to serve the communities who support them. Every community college has in its mission statement a reference to open enrollment and service to the community. By this nonexclusivity and mixing of boundaries, the community college has been considered by other colleges and universities not to be a full member of higher education. Yet, community colleges provide over fifty percent of all new college students a place to begin post secondary education. Consequently, community colleges are an increasingly important member of the higher education environment.

Every state has developed community colleges in unique systems that differ from each other. The continuum of systems began with states such as California and New York who developed community colleges into a comprehensive system that formally connects these institutions with four year colleges and universities. On the other end of the spectrum are states that provide haphazard services for their students based more on political and financial decisions than on a collective vision that serves constituents in a comprehensive manner (Gibson-Benninger, 1997). In states not providing community college opportunities to all students within reasonable commuting distances, there are also few provisions made for residency support or housing. Of the 1,046 registered institutions of the American Association of Community Colleges, only fifty-five self identify themselves as having dormitories and eighteen have boarding costs (Li, 1995). That leaves ninety-five percent of community colleges which do not offer housing. For colleges that serve a defined region within commuting distance for their students, then housing will not be an issue. Community colleges serving a wider region beyond an easy commuting distance for their students need to consider providing residency support.

The Importance of the Retention of Students

Keeping students long enough to achieve their academic, personal, or occupational goals is the aim of any higher education institution. The numbers reported are conflicting and sometimes not comparable because of institution type. For instance, over half of all entering community college students will leave before they complete their first year of college (Tinto, 1993). A more precise study claims, "in 1996 the percentage of all college freshmen not returning for their sophomore year has increased to 26.9 percent, nearly 2.5 percent since 1983, according to an American College Testing (ACT) report. Although these reports span a range of twenty three percent, they both point to an attrition rate that merits attention. ACT also found that the percentage of students who graduate with a bachelors degree within five years has fallen to what appears to be an all-time low", only one-half of those students who enroll in college ever graduate (Long, 1996, p.8). Retention of students is an important subject for higher education institutions and the students they serve. Colleges and universities can do better and need to improve if they are to survive economically. Students need to achieve their academic goals in order to meet further success. Unfortunately, "forty percent of entering freshmen in four-year colleges never earn degrees, and the community college retention rates are even lower" (Drew, 1990, p.54). These reports are not be consistent in providing uniform numbers of retention and attrition, but they do highlight problems many institutions have with student attrition.

For many students who arrive at a community college there are additional forces preventing the successful completion of academic goals. Comparing four year public institutions with two year public colleges for the 1992 year, the attrition rate for first time full time students after the first year was 28.3 percent and 47.9 percent respectively (Tinto, 1993). Only thirty to forty percent of freshmen at four year colleges graduate within four years. In one major public college system, only 16 percent of community college students receive their two year associate's degree within four years. Community colleges are different from their four year counterparts. "For the most part community colleges are nonresidential in character and are frequently located in settings where the influence of external communities may be substantial" (Tinto, 1987P. 169). It is precisely for that reason, studies concentrating on attrition rates at two year colleges are critical to better understanding of the phenomenon.

Retention and attrition of community college freshmen is a researchable subject of great interest in recent years. The issue of student departure rates are of particular interest because these rates are higher in two year institutions than in four year colleges and universities (Jalomo, 1995). Many new students, especially those who have never been away from home, have difficulty in learning to fend for themselves in the new academic world of college. Unfortunately, there are a number of young students whose homes are too far from their chosen college to commute and therefore they might live on their own. While many students soon adjust to college, others have great difficulty either in separating themselves from past associations or in adjusting to the academic and social life of the college. Not surprisingly, the incidence of withdrawal is highest during this early stage of the college career. The individual least integrated into, and therefore least committed to, the institution is most susceptible to the pains and doubts which separation and transition evoke (Tinto, 1993). Astin's theory (1985) of student involvement asserts that the more students invest physical and psychological energy toward involvement in the academic and social culture of the college, the greater is their greater potential for student success.

Reasons students give for leaving the institution prematurely are consistent in the literature. A study of an individual community college in 1985 explored three significant factors contributing to first time students leaving. Employment factors, academic performance, pre-matriculation academic goals, and academic major uncertainty, all contribute toward attrition rates for these students (McLean, 1986). Nevertheless, it is probably a mistake to view academic performance as a leading

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cause of attrition rather than a major symptom of attrition. For instance, Astin (1985) found that more than twenty hours of employment per week negatively effected student persistence in college. "Decisions to withdraw are more a function of what occurs after entry than of what precedes it" (Tinto, 1987, p.6). "Students are more likely to become committed to the institution, and therefore stay, when they come to understand that the institution is committed to them. Retention of students requires a continuing commitment to the education of students" (Tinto, 1987, p. 176).

Overall, the literature points out that attrition of first year students at community colleges attempting to complete their first year is close to fifty percent. Understanding why students have such difficult times needs to be examined. Institutions committed to retention and subsequent success of students need better information to provide services necessary to assist these students. Although more information is currently available about freshman at residential four year colleges and universities, applicable literature on community colleges is just beginning. Community college students evidently require more assistance than is currently given. Finding effective programs which increase retention is the expected result of increased research on the subject.

A Brief Examination of Student Development Theory

The early colleges and universities in the United States were patterned after European schools. Administrators, faculty, and staff all shared responsibility for the development and education of students. It was not until the late nineteenth century that developmental needs began to be assigned to specific individuals or departments on campus. Deans of Men and Deans of Women were positions created to administer extracurricular activities, housing, and discipline (Brubacher and Rudy, 1958). This was a popular model until the middle of this century, although a few colleges continue to hold to this previously described system.

Until as recently as the 1960's, college officials treated students as children using a legal philosophy known as *in loco parentis.* Sir William Blackstone first used the term *in loco parentis* in 1770 in his commentaries on English law in which he stated, "The father may also delegate part of his parental authority, during his life, to the tutor or schoolmaster, of his child, who is then *in loco parentis* and has such a portion of the power of the parent committed to his charge, viz. That of restraint and correction as may be necessary to answer the purposes for which he is employed" (Bickel & Lake, 1994, p. 264). Black's Law Dictionary defines *in loco parentis* as: "In the place of a parent; instead of a parent; charged factitiously with a parent's rights, duties and responsibilities" (1990, p. 787). Colleges and universities were held to this definition until the student unrest of the 1960's challenged this concept within the court. "In a sad chapter in American higher education's legal history, some universities effectuated expulsions in the 1960's in retaliation for student speech protected by traditional First Amendment guarantees. It is in this context that the doctrine of *in loco parentis* was reviewed, and some courts understandably found it wanting" (Bickel & Lake, 1994, p. 266). "...Universities have argued that, since they no longer stand *in loco parentis*, and do not enjoy a custodial authority over their students, there is no basis in the common law for the imposition of a duty upon the university to control student behavior" (Bradshaw v. Rawlings, 612 F2d, 135 (3d Cir) (1979)) (Catt, 1996).

It was apparent that societal changes and the student unrest of the 1960's required a new approach on America's campuses. That new approach became the Student Development movement as characteristics defined in three seminal documents commissioned by the leadership of the Council of Student Personnel Associations of Higher Education (COSPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). The "Student Development Services in Higher Education," "Student Development in

Tomorrow's Higher Education - A Return to the Academy," and the 1972 statement by the Higher Education Project (T.H.E.) of ACPA all helped create a theory of student development (Bloland, 1991).

Student development rests primarily upon the works of three theoreticians that have examined human development, concentrating on the issues late adolescents face in maturing toward adulthood.

> Greater attention is given to the theories of Arthur Chickering, Lawrence Kohlberg, and William Perry, who have probably had more influence than any others on the study of college's impact on students and on institutional policies and programs specifically designed to shape student development. (Zeller, 1991, p. 18)

Chickering (1981) used the notion of seven vectors to describe ways in which students develop during their college years. Acknowledging the influence of the environment in development, he suggests that colleges and universities have a responsibility to provide constructive environments for students. The seven vectors, which the collegiate environment can influence, are as follows:

1. Achieving Competence- Progression in the college years is toward increased competence in intellectual areas, in physical and manual skills, and in social and interpersonal relations. This sense of competence is the confidence the student has in the ability to cope with what comes and to achieve successfully what [one] sets out to do.
2. Managing Emotions- Students must wrestle with a variety of intense emotions that have both biological and social origins. The task is to develop increasing capacity for passion and commitment accompanied by increasing this capacity through intelligent behavior.

3. Developing Autonomy- Relationships based on mutual respect and helpfulness are established as the individual confronts the paradox of personal independence and interdependence.

4. Establishing Identity- The concept of identity remains general, however, a "solid sense of self", and one that may undergo change over a lifetime. These issues are not confined to college students, but may occur at later phases of life as well.

5. Freeing Interpersonal Relationships- Increased tolerance and respect for those of different backgrounds, habits, values, and appearance, and shifts in the quality of relationships with intimates and close friends.

6. Developing Purpose- Growth requires the development of plans that integrate priorities in recreational and vocational interests, vocational plans and aspirations, and life-style choices.

7. Developing Integrity- the clarification of a personally valid set of beliefs which have some internal consistency and that provide at least a tentative guide for behavior. (Chickering, 1981)

Perry established nine positions through which, most college students journey in their quest for knowledge and personal maturation.

Position 1- Authorities must know what is right. If we work hard, read every word, and learn Right Answers, all will be well.

Position 2- True authorities must be right, the others are frauds. We remain right. Others must be different and wrong.

Position 3- Some uncertainties and different opinions are real and legitimate, at least temporarily. Authorities are working on them to get to the truth.

Position 4- (a). Where authorities don't know the right answers, everyone has a right to his/her own opinion; no one is wrong. (b). Authorities are not asking for the right answer, they want us to think about things in a certain way, supporting opinion with facts.

Position 5- Everything is relative but not equally valid. You have to understand how each context works.

Position 6- All decisions are made by the individual in an uncertain world with no one telling them if they are right.

Position 7- By making a commitment, whether in a career or marriage, everything else will fall into place.

Position 8- After making several commitments a balance must be achieved of how many to make and how deep they should be.

Position 9- An individual must be wholehearted while tentative, fighting for personal values yet respect others, ready to learn. This journey will be retraced many times over, each time, hopefully wiser. (Perry, 1981, p. 79)

Students also find a sense of personal meaning in the world through an affirmation of their own commitments (Gardner and Upcraft, 1989).

Kohlberg continues development theory by concentrating on late adolescent moral judgment. He suggests that students mature by traversing six stages at varying ages. It is assumed that earlier stages are accomplished before students enter college, but that is not always the case. In each stage there is an entirely different view of what is ethical and how the determination of what is moral or ethical is made (Helfgot and Culp, 1995).

1. Punishment and obedience - literal obedience to rules and authority, avoiding punishment, and not doing physical harm.

2. Individual instrumental purpose and exchange - serving one's own or other's needs and making fair deals in terms of concrete exchange.
3. Mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships, and conformity - playing a nice role, being concerned about the other people and their feelings, keeping loyalty and trust with partners, and being motivated to follow rules and expectations.
4. Social system and conscience maintenance - doing one's duty in society, upholding the social order, and maintaining the welfare of society or the group.
5. Prior rights and social contract or utility - upholding basic rights, values, and legal contracts of a society, even when they conflict with the concrete rules and laws of the group.
6. Universal ethical principles - assumes guidance by universal ethical principles that all humanity should follow. (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 409 - 412)

Kohlberg called for virtue and justice in education, noting that philosophy and moral development could be taught in deliberate ways. He not only calls for justice within education, but to teach it blatantly and without apology. His developmental philosophy holds as much wisdom for teachers as his stage theory describes student moral development.

Student development theory provides a philosophical base for the profession by which responses to student need can be evaluated and implemented. Chickering, Perry, and Kohlberg each provide a different perspective of the natural development of students. By applying these theories to student behavior, student affairs professionals can assist institutional response to student need in enlightened ways. These men had greatly influenced the profession of student affairs and continue to do so, but other theorists have responded to the increasing diversity of culture, age, gender, and other issues. There are numerous new publications about these issues that underscore a basic premise that student affairs professionals have held since its original statement of practice in 1937 called The Student Personnel Point of View. "Each student is a unique person and must be treated as such" (Wimbish, Bumphus, & Helfgot, 1995, p. 19).

With the advent of student development theories, the entire profession of student personnel in higher education hailed the arrival of a new theory on which to base itself. There was no serious challenge or critique accepted. Even the professional journals were renamed to reflect widespread acceptance of student development. ACPA's journal, originally entitled the Journal of College Student Personnel, was renamed the Journal of College Student Development in 1971. In spite of such agreement, twenty years later Paul Bloland challenged these theories of student development as the only theoretical foundation by which this profession operates. He expresses this concern in a 1991 article.

> So today we have a professional association that regards Human Development as the commonly held core of the profession, a journal that has apparently reoriented its traditional focus from the general concerns of the broad student affairs field to concentrate on student development, and a profession that has committed its future to a version of its mission that has not yet proven itself and, in fact, has failed markedly to accomplish its major goals. (Bloland, 1991, p. 6)

Since 1991, events and paradigm shifts have influenced major student personnel organizations such as ACPA and NASPA to rethink the profession's mission to students, institutions, and society. It is a forgone conclusion that college students are no longer only young white males earning a degree in four years at one institution that provides room, board, coursework, and social values. "Research conducted during the 1980s confirmed the significance of individual and cultural characteristics as critical factors in development, especially those which serve to differentiate one from the majority population in a given environment" (Garland and Grace, 1993 p. 85). Today's higher education environment is much more diverse, complex, and messy.

In 1993 the Wingspread Group Report on Higher Education entitled "An American Imperative: Higher Expectations for Higher Education" called for a return to an emphasis on student learning as the focus of higher education. As President of ACPA, Charles Schroeder responded to this call by organizing a group of senior scholars and practitioners in student affairs to discuss the relationship of student affairs to the student learning mission of higher education. The Student Learning Imperative (SLI) was the response to how student affairs organizations could fit into this renewed emphasis on student learning. The introduction of the SLI has stimulated a debate over the fundamental mission of student affairs, encompassing issues such as student development, student services, ways of learning, and principles advanced in the "Student Personnel Point of View" (1937). (Blimling, 1996, p. 113)

The Student Learning Imperative, and an understanding of the diversity of present day college students, has begun the creation of new guidelines which expand theories of student development to be more inclusive and academic. The most recent proposed guidelines for good practice in student affairs include the following seven principles presented at the combined meetings of ACPA and NASPA at Chicago in March of 1997.

Good practice in student affairs:

1. Engages students in active learning.
2. Helps students build coherent values and ethical standards.
3. Sets high expectations for students and student affairs practitioners.
4. Uses systematic inquiry to improve student and institutional performance.

5. Provides leadership and efficient use of resources to help achieve the institution's mission and goals.
6. Forges educational partnerships.
7. Builds supportive and inclusive communities. (ACPA\NASPA, 1997, p. 35)

Student development theories assist the profession of student affairs in performing valuable services for the institutions they serve. Retention of students and helping students reach their academic goals are an important part of that service. As students, institutions, and the environment changes, so too will these theories change. Nonetheless, it is from these theories that a foundation is provided for policy and action.

Conversely, the absence of developmental consideration contributes to the attrition of students (Tinto, 1987, Helfgot & Culp, 1995, Noel, Levitz, & Saluri, 1986). Ignoring the needs students have in their development and not providing some manner of support adds unnecessary obstacles for students. The profession within higher education that seeks to support students through developmental support systems is student affairs. Through research, experience, and proper action, support systems provide students with necessary tools to learn how to cope and mature while meeting academic goals. Without support, students fail, not just because of failing grades, but for a variety of intertwining obstacles that can overwhelm a struggling college student. When analyzing attrition rates and perceived obstacles students describe, the practices and theories relating to student development will be used to give perspective and guidance to the findings.

Student development theory provides a framework and context for a considered response to student needs as they enter and participate at colleges and universities. As this theory evolves into a belief system for student affairs; debate, challenges, and new thinking will be on this profession's agenda for years to come. Retention studies help place a clearer purpose for institutional response to student needs. When numbers exhibit an exodus of students, meeting student needs become more than theory, they signal a fight for institutional survival. Student affairs departments are called on to provide ways of improving retention and curtailing attrition. However, with the flux of theoretical grounding and the uniqueness of each institution, no one response can be prescribed. It is the responsibility of each institution to analyze, plan, and respond to their own students' needs.

Mix of Community Colleges and Student Development Theory

Community colleges are unique institutions and relatively young in comparison to other higher education institutions. Only 656 of 1,080 community colleges existed before 1960 (Cohen, 1996). A substantial number of today's institutions were created after that date (Katsingas, 1996). The field of student affairs, based upon student development theory, is also a relatively young profession with shifting paradigms of belief and means of providing service. The combination of youthful institutions, a young profession, and changing theory result in an active environment with little stability or perspective to evaluate direction, service, or priorities.

For example, new student populations are constantly attracted to community colleges. "As a result of the open door policy, underprepared students, reentry women, mid-life career changers, students of color, physically challenged individuals, and non-native speakers succeeded one another as the "new" community college student, changing forever the profile of higher education in America" (Martens, Lara, Cordova, Harris, 1995, p. 5). Each new population brings with it new research, funding agencies assisting the new population, and conferences and organizations which support the new population. These students can be minority students, older students, gay/lesbian/bi-sexual students, students of one gender entering a profession dominated by the opposite gender, gifted students, alternatively educated students, or other populations that are new, flashy, and catch the attention of grant dispensing institutions (Pascarella, 1997).

As community colleges attract new populations because of open enrollment policies, location, and low cost, pressures increase to serve these populations. Each new population generates pressure within an institution to which student services typically respond. Funding agencies, public attention, and administrators are enamored by the opportunities espoused in something new. The political and fiscal pressures placed upon student affairs departments to react to new priorities often eliminate valuable services to traditional students which ultimately result in attrition increases from the larger student population.

All higher education organizations are susceptible to these pressures, but community colleges are more susceptible because they are dependent on current funds and grants. They have almost no endowments and have less history on which to base their institutional mission and how to plan a consistent response over time, restricting their long term stability with this kind of immediacy. This implies that every political swing can drastically affect these younger institutions. When politicians wish to fix a new social ill, community colleges are more than likely to be a conduit of attempted social change (e.g. President Clinton's project named 'America Reads' places half of all federal work study money given to community colleges to hire college students to assist children in learning to read before third grade). Another example is how politicians view remedial education, fearing redundancy with the current system. In New York legislators determined that community colleges take over this task from four year institutions.

Community colleges are also young, most being less than forty years old. Within the past forty years higher education has changed dramatically, but community colleges were born during that change and have yet to establish a recognizable long term identity to the general public. Their very strengths of adaptability and ability to react to community demands cause them to lack the stability necessary to serve a full generation of students in a consistent manner. Pressures to react to academic and social needs of the surrounding community never cease for this particular institution within higher education.

Creating strategies that enhance the likelihood of student success can be accomplished when research and practice keep pace with changing student populations, theoretical challenges, and institutional policy. There is a greater challenge within community colleges because these changes occur with increased frequency and intensity. More studies sharing information regarding student success are necessary at this time. In the conclusion of a recent article on retention and attrition, Brawer (1996) shares this observation.

> In sum, the intervention strategies that are widely used and evidence the greatest impact include orientation programs, mentoring, and multiple strategy approaches. Since different students may require different approaches, colleges are beginning to take a more holistic approach toward persistence by implementing multiple intervention strategies. Because dropping out often has negative implications, it behooves the colleges to use one or more of these intervention strategies in order to raise retention rates while simultaneously lowering attrition rates. (P. 4)

Profile of Community College Students

Who are community college students? Because these colleges have open enrollments, there is a high likelihood of increased diversity of age, color, creed, and ability. Increased diversity of ability regularly requires a greater variety of academic and developmental services. Often lost in attempts to meet demands from new populations are services for traditional aged students who do not fit easily into programs for the relatively new populations. The assumption is frequently made that students who meet all other traditional admission criteria will not need special services. As community colleges continue to attract a wider variety of student it is prudent to reiterate Cohen's inquiry, "which people benefit most from, and which are harmed by, an institution that allows all to attend at their pleasure? For which students should society pay full fare? The personal and social implications of these questions give way rapidly to the political and fiscal as soon as they are put to the test" (1996, p. 65).

Although the face of the community college student is changing, there will always be students who need support services in basic life skills in order to succeed academically. According to Abraham Maslow, an individual cannot attend to higher level needs when basic needs are not yet met. From lowest to highest, Maslow's hierarchical needs are (1) physiological- shelter, food, and sleep; (2) safety- protection against harm, security, consistency; (3) belongingness and love- acceptance, affection; (4) esteem- self-respect, worth, status; and (5) self-actualization- development of full potential and individuality , knowledge and understanding, and aesthetic appreciation (1966).

> It is essential for institutions to provide services to help meet students' basic needs for housing, transportation, food, security of person and possessions, health care, and child care...A student who has not found satisfactory living or

> transportation arrangements is not able to concentrate fully on classwork or likely to participate in co-curricular programs. Similarly, a student who feels like a second-class citizen would most likely not seek out within the campus community the kinds of risk-taking experiences that lead to personal growth. (Jacoby, 1989, p. 36)

"We must realize that new students leave college for all kinds of reasons that are preventable. We have been tolerating attrition that we should not have tolerated because of our academic social Darwinian assumptions" (Zeller, 1991, p.15).

Community colleges attract some students who are not prepared for academic work and are struggling with basic life issues that inhibit higher learning. If colleges are to help students succeed, then those issues need to be addressed. The revolving door of admissions to attrition is no longer acceptable. Community colleges are wasting resources by allowing students to fail by not providing basic services needed to succeed. There is a possibility that community colleges are harming some of these young students in ways that can be prevented. John Dewey wrote in 1933, "we never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment. Whether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose makes a great difference" (p.22). Community colleges leave a great deal to chance when permitting students to move into their community without a support system. There are ways to enhance a student's experience outside the college that improve academic skills and retention. Although not well publicized or researched, there are a number of innovative approaches some community colleges are using to enhance student experiences within their communities. Strategies and programs that promote inclusion and belonging among students have shown substantial results in student success at community colleges (Helfgot & Culp, 1995). One college addresses this problem by using sophomore mentors who live on their own to provide a trustworthy support system for those new to this experience (p.69). Other colleges provide housing lists or residence halls, but many community colleges provide little support at this time.

Pennsylvania originally planned to build 28 community colleges to serve all its students within a comfortable commuting distance (Department of Education, 1987). With operating costs subsidized by the state and a sponsoring local agent, student tuition was intended to be substantially lower than any other higher education institution. Only fourteen such institutions were established in accord with Act 484 of 1963. Cohen (1986) defined a comfortable commuting distance as within a twenty five mile radius for one trip. Since Pennsylvania only created fourteen community colleges, this state cannot be considered to be fully serving its population through this form of higher education. The state is is unable to fully serve its population through this form of higher educaiton. Pennsylvania is only one example of many states that did not complete the original vision of their community college plan. Fewer institutions leaves a gap in service to students from counties far from a community college. When those students do matriculate to a community college, they are forced to move to that community in order to avoid an unreasonable commute. Without additional support services, these students may be at a disadvantage when compared to peers of equal ability and age.

Jacoby from the University of Maryland has written extensively on commuter students (1980, 1989). Although highlighting students attending four year institutions that usually have the option of living in residence halls, her observations help define this population and the problems they face. She defines commuter students as all who do not live in institution owned housing, stating that commuter students are an extraordinarily diverse population. Their numbers include full time and part time students of traditional age who live with their parents, who live in rental housing near the campus, and adults who may have careers and children of their own. The population of commuter students will continue to become more diverse as the number of part time, adult and minority students enrolled in higher education increases (Jacoby, 1989).

Community colleges enroll each of the student populations described. This study will concentrate on traditional age students, typically full time, who live in apartments relatively near campus with little, or no, life skill support from the college they attend. These are not students who have extensive life experience to assist them in making countless life decisions, nor do they have family members close enough to help effectively. Brann defined students entering college within one year of graduating from high school as being 'direct-entry' students (1995). Not only are they young, but their life experience typically is limited. Little research has been done about these particular students at community colleges within higher education literature in the last decade.

Many of these students are the first generation in their families to attend college. The ACPA magazine entitled About Campus recently featured articles on first generation students. Howard London (1996) described the variety of color, age, background, and creed that dispels the easy categorization these students bring to campus. Laura Rendon, describing the population through quotes she has gathered from first year community college students, concluded that... "In essence, the passage to college needs to be gradual, allowing students time to slowly break away and to develop their autonomy and academic identity" (1996, p.19). Community colleges were created to serve this type of gradual passage into academia by allowing students to continue living in home environments while adjusting to new thoughts, ideals, and disciplines. A first generation student can easily be overwhelmed by professors, books, term papers, and labs; in addition to processes of registration, withdrawal, probation, and suspension. This is culture shock in a very real sense that disorients and confuses even the most determined student. New academic realities and pressures of being away from home for the first time may contribute to the failure that many eighteen year old students experience during the first semester.

Parents' perception of college, especially if they are not familiar with the institution, can be quite different from the realities their children will face. Community colleges are attractive to parents of first generation college students because of low cost and a relatively close location. Not only is tuition low, but they can usually find low cost accommodations in the community that are less expensive than most residence hall charges at four year institutions. First generation parents assume that their child will be supervised in some manner by the college, in spite of disclaimers made by admission officers. Deans of students at many community colleges field numerous inquiries from distant parents concerning erratic behavior and suspicion of drug use or unsavory friends. Parents are surprised to hear that administrative action is limited to the boundaries of college property and that their child is really on their own in a community that may be intolerant of freshman behavior. Landlords complain and evict students from apartments and vow never to rent to college students again, making it more difficult for students who follow in future years to find appropriate accommodations.

> First generation students come from a culture very different than the academic environment in which we expect them to succeed. College, when it is effective, transforms students into more confident, self aware, thinking citizens

who see a wider world and how they fit into it. Parents and others from the student's home find some of these changes disconcerting. Laura Rendon quoted one first generation student in her article for the About Campus magazine, "sometimes family members get threatened or friends get threatened. They start thinking that now you're in college you think you're better than them. You know, a lot of times they resent that -- feeling threatened. They think that you're too big for them or too much for them" (1997, p. 18).

Academic counselors are sometimes asked to justify the need for courses in the humanities or social sciences for students enrolled in technical or business programs. College educated parents who enjoyed the privilege of expanding their world view through studying literature, other cultures, and the arts expect the same experiences for their children as part of a maturation process. Conversely, first generation students have parents who expect their children to be the same as they are, only to be more marketable and get better jobs. These parents do not expect their children to change drastically or to be awakened to new possibilities, perhaps to enter occupations unheard of in that community. "Equally as dramatic as these awakenings and discoveries are the transformations that accompany them in other realms of students' lives, namely the psychological, the family, and the cultural realms (London, 1996, p.12)". These particular community college students may need additional support that many other students do not require.

Why is this Study Important to Community Colleges?

There are three reasons which illustrate why colleges need to address the issues of this particular student population. First, attrition of these students after their first year is usually above the average stop-out rates of the overall class. The problem of attrition is compounded by the fact that this population is more expensive to recruit.

Travel and contacts in school districts outside the normal service area, extra time with parents and housing issues, and supporting specialized academic programs which depend upon these students, all increase the need for sincere retention efforts. Second, the mix of unsupervised, young college students within communities, typically unaccustomed to student behavior, bring opportunities for bad publicity. Police calls to parties and drug use among some college students only serve to turn a supportive community into hostile voices which can influence politicians and business leaders. Finally, potential law suits naming the college for damages to property, unfulfilled promises to the student, and conflicts that spill onto the campus from disputes begun in the apartments can harm the legal and economic standing of the college.

Legal Issues in Providing Services

Should college administrators be cautious about offering services outside the property boundaries of the institution? Of course in this litigious age, every action and service needs to be examined and properly executed. "Courts are increasingly finding colleges and universities negligent, and therefore liable, for crimes committed on campus" (Raddatz, 1988, p. 2). *In loco parentis* may no longer apply to the present, but that does not deny students the right to expect reasonable care on the part of the college (Catt, 1996). Arguments can be made for, and against, the issue of providing services for students living on their own in an unfamiliar community. Even without a clear precedent, the question should be one of prudent action taken to encourage student success.

Retention, liability, publicity, politics, and economics are all valid and important reasons community colleges, with or without residence support systems, should review strategies which promote student success. The only legal obligation a college has toward a student is to provide the opportunity to fulfill academic goals as cited in most college catalogues. No college can control all the variables within individual lives which influence goal attainment. Nonetheless, by permitting new students to place themselves in a potentially unsupportive environment, colleges allow one more hurdle to further challenge students who are already disadvantaged.

Conclusion

Not all community colleges will be interested in a study such as this. Most rural community colleges are naturally isolated and provide students with residence halls. In fact, as of 1993, approximately twenty three percent of all two year colleges provided some type of housing for their students (Peterson, 1993). Of those, most only had room for a small number of specially recruited students, such as athletes or students enrolled in specialized academic programs. Therefore, approximately seventy seven percent of community colleges do not offer any official housing. Urban colleges, those having concentrated populations living within reasonable commuting distances, have little need for residence halls because their students typically live near the campus. Because suburban community colleges are really a hybrid of urban and rural colleges (Katsinas, 1993), there are increasing numbers of students coming from further distances.

This study will be useful to those administrators and faculty interested in improving retention and enhancing student success at community colleges. Literature relating to retention and community colleges has shown a number of issues which need to be investigated, discussed, and clarified. Noteworthy among the issues is one relating to traditional aged students living away from and without the support of their nuclear families while attending community colleges. Preliminary data show that a higher attrition rate occurs among young students who attend a college too far away to travel from their homes. Adjusting to both a new lifestyle and academic rigors, these students may be exposed to increased pressures which may impede academic success. Students, inexperienced with independent living, may have problems not previously brought to our attention. This is a subject area unique to community colleges and which deserves attention from theorists and practitioners interested in student success.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

This dissertation begins the study of obstacles certain students of traditional age meet when living independently while attending a community college offering little off campus support. Ten students and six employees at one community college in one academic year were examined to determine the types of problems students encounter. Consequences of these obstacles were also examined in comparison with the total population of students of the same age at this college. The complexity of determining another person's thoughts and how those perceptions affect behavior demands an equally complex data collection and analysis. Because social interactions are unpredictable and contradictory, Bogdan and Bilklen (1992) offer this advice in performing qualitative studies;

> Have preferences [in data collection], but do not be single-minded in choices. In the beginning you never know what you are going to find. Do not rigidly adhere to pre-study plans. Treat your initial visits as exploratory opportunities to assess what is feasible. Be prepared to modify your expectations and change your design or you may spend too much time searching for "the right study" when it might not exist (p.61).

The following design is believed to represent the best possible means to gather and analyze this data, and to present reasonable conclusions based upon information gathered throught those means.

Qualitative Methodology

A qualitative case study was chosen for this particular subject because quantitative methods alone do not always allow rich perceptions about complex social environments. Subjects were interviewed and examined from a variety of perspectives. This process of triangulation recognized the development of themes about these students. Qualitative inquirey generated findings which were not anticipated. The literature suggested some issues which might appear through this investigation, but this research is intended to uncover information which could not be predicted. Protocols accepted in the areas of qualitative research, case study research, field work, interviewing, and analysis have been followed so that the results can be trusted.

Multiple methods of collecting data known as triangulation were used in this study. "Unfortunately no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival causal factors...multiple methods should be used in every investigation, since no method is ever free of rival causal factors" (Denzin, 1978, p 28). "Methodological triangulation combines dissimilar methods such as interviews, observations, and physical evidence to study the same unit" (Merriam, 1988, p. 69). Methods used in this research included interviews of students and college employees, examination of policies and public reports, and analysis of statistical data concerning academic standing.

Qualitative research has particular characteristics that enhance the ability to gain a holistic view of the subject. Merriam (1988) shares six characteristics that help define the uniqueness and value which a qualitative approach can offer. First, qualitative research focuses on the process rather than outcomes and so provides a springboard for a deeper examination into the problem. Questions such as; how do

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things happen? what is the history? or how did we get to this point?; are asked to focus the process on the situation being observed. Second, meaning is explored. People make sense of their lives through experiences that can be interpreted through the researcher's own perceptions. This is an intricate exploration of what people are thinking and what causes them to act as they do. Third, the researcher is the primary data collector. In complex social environments the researcher can be responsive to unanticipated events, can see the total picture, and can process data immediately in order to pursue information that may otherwise be lost. Fourth, qualitative research requires field work. The researcher has to be there, go to the place, be with the people. This is a reality that cannot be substituted by numbers or remote techniques. Fifth, qualitative research is a descriptive process which uses words or pictures, to best describe what the researcher has learned. Finally, this type of research is largely inductive and builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories, rather than testing existing theories (Merriam, 1988). These attributes are consistent with the purposes of this research. The subject is too rich and complex to limit its discoveries with a non-qualitative approach.

Single Case Study

Case study research provides the context and specifies the tools used in this qualitative study. Characteristics of a case study are particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive. Being particularistic means that the study focuses on a particular instance, situation, event, program, or phenomenon. It provides a holistic view of the situation and is problem centered, usually small scale. (Shaw, 1978, p.2)

A case study is also descriptive, providing a complete, literal description of the instance or entity being investigated. "Interpreting the meaning of demographic and descriptive data in terms of cultural norms and mores, community values, deep-seated attitudes and notions, and the like." (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p.119) A heuristic perspective illuminates the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study. The researcher becomes a discoverer of new meaning by expressing previously unknown relationships and variables. Case studies are also inductive as opposed to deductive, as are most quantitative studies. Generalizations, concepts, and hypotheses emerge from examination of data, grounded in the context itself (Merriam, 1988).

"Occasionally, one may have tentative working hypotheses at the outset of a case study, but these expectations are subject to reformulation as the study proceeds. Discovery of new relationships, concepts, and understanding, rather than verification or predetermined hypotheses, characterizes qualitative studies (Merriam, 1988, p.12)." Case studies also examine a specific instance, but illuminate a general problem. This study examined the lives of students attending a community college, but no one realized what other issues were involved until the data were analyzed.

Description of Single Environment

This community college, found in a northeastern state, is located between a large urban area and a larger rural region. Several community colleges serve the urban region to its south, but there are no other community colleges serving the northern rural areas. Students seeking quality, low cost, post-secondary education from the northern areas have no choice but to make arrangements for a lengthy commute, or live in the immediate area of the college. The college has fifteen buildings located on a former golf course situated three miles from the host community of 50,000 people. The total student population for the academic year of 1996 to 1997 was 3,100. 1,600 of these students are full time, twelve credits or more per semester. The average age of the student is twenty-four, but new students applying to the college average an age of nineteen. All students commute, there are no residence halls and there are few apartments located within one mile of the campus.

This college is considered suburban because it is more than forty miles from a major urban area, but serves a substantial population within a comfortable commuting distance of twenty five miles (Cohen, 1990). Regardless, students living beyond twenty five miles are attracted to this college because it offers specialized academic programs and there are few low cost opportunities for higher education at a two year institution within a large portion of the state.

Students move to the community to attend this college in order to enroll in a specialized program, lower their cost of education, or attend a college that accepts students with lower academic records. Specialized programs include nursing, physical therapy assistant, medical assistant, and metrology. Each of these have a combination of competitive admissions criteria; requiring prior testing, skill development, and proof of volunteer experiences. The college also has substantial articulation agreements with four year institutions that create an increasingly attractive climate for students aspiring to bachelors and masters degrees. Education and biology are two popular transfer programs with business and computer technology increasing their transfer and job placement potential. By attending a community college for the first two years, students can save substantial tuition money in their pursuit of higher degrees. Students who had academic difficulty in high school or at another institution can not only be accepted into a college, but have available tutoring, counseling, and academic support services that are sometimes not offered at other institutions or come at a higher cost. For some students this community college is an attractive alternative to more costly, and those perceived as less friendly, higher education institutions.

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For the purposes of this study, students living in counties beyond forty miles from the campus were examined. Of 502 traditional age students, thirty-eight were identified as coming from homes in the counties identified (see Table 2). These students were most likely to move into the community because the commute for these students from their homes ranged approximately forty miles to seventy miles. Normally it would cost a student from a county within the state twice the cost of a student from the host county, but agreements among neighboring counties that do not host a community college are becoming more accepted. These agreements lower the tuition for these students at the community college in exchange for teaching sites in that county. As these agreements become more prevalent, more students attend from these distant counties because the cost becomes less. There are no other accredited higher education institutions which come close to the low cost of tuition for a wide region encompassing the northwest corner of the state. More than fifteen counties, with locations more than 250 miles from the campus, have students who find this community college attractive. As the region the college officially serves increases, more students will attend. Since 1996, two counties were added to the three counties originally served. With another county in negotiation with the college at this time, the trend of widening the service area appears to be gaining momentum.

Community colleges, especially those considered rural or suburban, are typically built in areas not formerly served by higher education institutions. Indeed their purpose is to provide programs essential to serve the unmet educational needs in geographical areas outside other institutional service areas. These programs include associate degrees, continuing education, and developmental programs (State Board of Education, 1986). Communities surrounding these colleges have little history with student interaction or services that support these students. Because these colleges serve local populations, they usually do not provide much assistance to students regarding living in those communities. Typically, local residents are familiar with the community and therefore do not require services.

Because the college is an open enrollment institution, this research will include students who are extremely diverse in ability and experience. Community colleges offer some academic programs which have competitive admission policies and students within those programs are often the best prepared upon admission. This particular site has four competitive programs out of the thirty academic programs it offers. Therefore, the academic caliber of its students can either be very high, or in need of developmental coursework. Academic diversity is further influenced by the mixing of students planning to transfer for a four year degree, with those seeking two year vocational programs. Accordingly, academic diversity can be viewed both in terms of preparation and goal aspiration.

Students coming from rural areas outside the local county are usually the first in their generation to attain higher education. For this particular study, thirty-eight students were identified as coming from a rural environment outside the county where the campus is located. Their family homes were located on farms or in very small towns, all farther than a ninety minute drive from the nearest urban area. There are a number of implications and problems these students bring with them which come to light when they are interviewed. For these reasons and more, these students and the college provide a rich environment in which to base this study.

This institution, although unique in many ways, is not uncommon in the problems this study addressed. There are hundreds of suburban community colleges which attract students outside a comfortable commuting distance. Of 1,080 community colleges identified by Katsinas in a Ford Foundation sponsored study, 257 were considered to be suburban and 696 community colleges were considered rural (1996). Although this was a single case site, findings of this study could be important for other colleges and universities.

The 513 community colleges listed in Peterson's Guide to Two Year Colleges (1997), only eighty six offered housing of some kind to their students. From this analysis, 83.2 percent of community colleges do not provide housing for their students. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, only five percent of all community colleges provide any type of housing (Li, 1995). Of those that do have residence halls, most are located in isolated rural areas that require such facilities in order for their students to attend. These sources represent two perspectives of community colleges in the United States that, although differ in the colleges identified, provide evidence that few community colleges offer any housing. Between these two

Table 1

Community Colleges Offering Housing for Students

1997 Peterson Guide to Two Year Colleges	
Total Community Colleges	513
Community Colleges Offering Housing	86
Percentage Offering Housing	16.8%
1995 American Association of Community Colleges	
Total Community Colleges	1046
Community Colleges Offering Housing	55
Percentage Offering Housing	5%

NOTE: Institutions self identified themselves as offering housing in both studies. No formal surveys or visits verify the accuracy of reports.

sources, there is also overlapping information in that some colleges appear on both surveys and a few colleges do not appear on either.

Data Collection

Initially an analysis was done comparing the academic progress of local students of traditional age with students living beyond a reasonable commuting distance. Interviews were conducted throughout the Summer and early Fall of 1997 with students, parents[1], and college employees. First, a sample of students was chosen using a criterion based upon their having graduated from a high school beyond a forty mile range from the college. Of a possible thirty-eight students identified through their graduating high school on the college application, twenty students were invited to participate with ten of those students agreeing to be interviewed. Students interviewed graduated from high schools in outside counties, representing an even mix of those who continued their studies at the college into the following Fall semester and those who dropped out for various reasons. Tapes and notes were compiled and organized as they took place. The local newspaper was analyzed for criminal activity and positive community activities that could involve young students from outside the area for the 1996-1997 academic year. Finally, police reports and landlord complaints to the Dean of Students were investigated as they related to students coming from outside the community. In order to obtain a holistic view of this phenomenon, a variety of data were gathered.

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1. Parents were identified and sent letters inviting them to participate in the study. When they were called for a phone interview, the first three parents refused to participate. For the stated reasons of not having the time, not feeling comfortable with the subject, and just a flat refusal, these subjects were not amiable to participation. In identifying the investigator as an administrator at the college in question and a graduate student of a large university, one suspected underlying reason was that these parents from rural areas were intimidated or did not want to jeopardize their child's education in any way. No more parents were called in order to prevent any possible misunderstanding between them and the college being studied.

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Interviewing

"Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (Merriam, 1988, p.72). This study required interviews because the events occurred in the past, the participants feelings and behaviors are important to the data, and it was the most cost efficient method of obtaining information. "The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Webb and Webb quoted in Burgess, 1982, p. 196).

The research design of a qualitative study is an evolving process, however there is a good purpose in entering the field with an interview schedule (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Acknowledging this evolving purpose, the proposed interview schedule and questions were changed a number of times before this study was completed. Parent interviews were attempted and subsequently eliminated for reasons stated in the footnotes. Since employee interviews were the simplest to arrange, many of them were completed before the last student interviews were finished. Investigations concerning the police, landlords, and local newspaper were completed after all interviews were finished. Analysis by the site's computer staff of academic standing and attrition rates was accomplished at the end of this study, providing results that were not expected.

All interview questions reflected the original research questions. Although these open ended questions were asked of all students, the order was sometimes changed to follow the conversation. The following interview questions were asked of all students.

- What difficulties did you experience as you prepared to live near the college?

- Describe the attitudes and service you received from college employees concerning your living arrangements.
- How were the attitudes of community members, not affiliated with the college, toward you as a college student?
- What experiences, outside the classroom, affected your studies?
- Were any problems great enough to hinder your academic progress?
- Did any of your friends, in similar situations as yours, encounter problems?
- Did the college or any of its employees help you through these problems? Did you know who to ask for help? What services were provided? Was the service beneficial to you?
- Could your needs be met in better ways?
- What services could the college provide to assist students, like you, that are not currently being provided?

Employees of the college shared their perspectives of these students. Administrators, faculty, and clerical staff representing those employees who have contact with this population were interviewed. Administrators were interviewed because they directly effect the policies and resources that can meet these student needs. Some faculty and student service professionals were interviewed because they interact with these students most frequently. Clerical staff in the Admissions and Student Life departments were interviewed for their direct experience in helping these students when they were first admitted and then as they continued through the first year. This group of college employees was interviewed in the early Fall of 1997. The interview questions asked of employees, again reflecting the research questions, were these:

- Of the students you know who live in these conditions, do they have a higher occurrence of academic problems than other students of similar age?
- What situations, outside the classroom, are you aware of that these students encounter?
- Have you assisted a student in situations outside the college? Are you aware of other employees assisting them somehow?
- What kinds of services does the college provide? How should the college serve these students?
- Do you know if other colleges provide services for these types of students?

Although there are a number of alternatives to interview the subjects and acquire data, this study used the semi-structured interview approach or focused interview. Denzin (1978) describes the focused interview as seeking certain types of information, but the exact wording, phrasing, and order of the questions are redefined to fit the circumstances. "The semi structured interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 1988, p.74). This unstructured type of interviewing was best for this situation because the subjects and their experiences were far ranging in subject and rich in depth.

Interview Process

All interviews were taped, with the subject's approval, and notes taken during the interview. Additional notes were added in different color ink immediately after the interview and then a few days later in yet another color as the researcher gained perspective. Appropriate quotes and observations were typed into the computer, divided into separate pieces of datum, and then analyzed. A unit of data was a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph coming from interview transcripts, observation notes, or documents (Merriam, 1988). A datum, also known as a unit, is a single unit of data, the smallest piece of data which can stand alone and still be intelligible (Lincoln, 1997). All separate datum were placed onto notecards in order to be placed into various themes. These themes then constituted the majority of the analysis and provided essential findings for this study.

Thematic Analysis

Various themes or categories emerged easily from the interviews and other information gathered. As the process ensued, these themes became the answers to research questions posed at the beginning of this study. "In contrast to the simple categories used to organize the case study data base or case record, higher level overriding and integrating, conceptualizations, and the properties that elaborate them tend to come later during the joint collection, coding, and analysis of data" (Merriam, 1988, p.133). These conceptualizations were guided by the data obtained and changed throughout the process until the final text was written. Only the researcher has the ability to analyze the data in order to create thematic sense of the subject, but it should be able to be repeated by another researcher with predictable results (Merriam, 1988).

Standpoint Epistemology (Researcher Biases Identified)

"The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (Patton, 1990, p. 279). The analysis and entire perspective of a qualitative study also depends solely on the researcher interacting with, and analyzing, the data. It is therefore important for the readers of this study to know who the researcher is, at least within categories that affect the perceptions this study has to offer.

Lincoln (1997, AERA Research Seminar) asserted that it is important that we as researchers, explain who we are to the reader so that any unintentional bias can be mitigated by this disclosure. "Open-minded does not mean empty-headed (Lincoln)." Therefore, in classifications that relate to this study, this is the "standpoint epistemology" of this researcher. The researcher has been a mid-level student affairs administrator at a community college for eleven years, spending most of his life in the northeast. Through this position, there has been intense involvement with students and their problems, thus a strong bias has developed toward students and parents who want colleges to be more involved in providing support services. This researcher also has a published article entitled, *Negligence and Liability in Higher Education* (Catt, 1996) which includes information relating directly to the issues discussed in this study. One other item of importance is that the researcher is a community college alumnus and is familiar with the community college setting from a variety of perspectives.

Conclusion

This research provides a holistic, personal view of the problems this population of students face and services that assist them. From interviewing a number of sources, providing statistical information about academic progress, and compiling reports about these students from local media and police reports, this study triangulates data into a realistic depiction of the problem and issues that were discovered.

IV. FINDINGS

Introduction

Interviews of students and employees make up the majority of findings for this study. By concentrating on student records and interviews from one year, a focused perspective of the phenomenon was analyzed. To assist in that analysis, other sources of information were explored. Police records were perused in the local newspaper to determine if this population of students met with more legal problems than others in their age group. A comparison between traditional age students and students living further than forty miles from campus was made of their academic records and attrition rates. These were compiled and analyzed for four years at this institution to provide a historical pattern of behavior.

This chapter begins with background information about the students and employees that provide the reader with perspective when reading quoted material from the interviews. From the interviews emerged information from the open ended questions that developed into a series of themes. Quoted students and employees answered each theme, with their answers separated for the reader's understanding. Finally, the data provided through police reports is compiled and analyzed.

Interview Descriptions

Ten students and six college employees participated in interviews for this study. Thirty eight students were identified from a computer search which sought eighteen to nineteen year old students entering college for the first time from homes at least forty miles from campus. These students were chosen randomly from that list and contacted by letter, phone call, and interview. Twenty-six students were sent an initial letter

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inviting them to participate in the study, fourteen responded. Five students chose not to participate for various reasons. Of these five, one student changed his mind after speaking to his parents and the mother of another stopped the interview from occurring. The others found times for the interview to be inconvenient, even though attempts were made to accommodate them. Of the nine students interviewed, five continued with their studies into their sophomore year. Three have stopped-out, moving back to their original homes and getting jobs. One transferred early to a nearby private college. In total, this sample represents twenty-four percent of the identified thirty-eight students falling into this narrow category.

Six employees were carefully chosen based upon their experience at the college and their interaction with this population of students. Two secretaries, two administrators, one dean, and one faculty member constitutes the employee pool of interviews. These employees represent over one hundred years of experience at this institution, extensive contact with these students, and duties that reach across the organization. Every one expressed grave concern for these students but all had differing opinions on causes, current practice, and possible solutions. However, administrators responsible for retention and discipline admitted, "quantifying the feeling I have that these students need extra attention, I cannot." Another administrator stated, "I'm not sure about the specifics of these students having a higher incidence of academic problems. The first year is rough for any student, no matter what their living experience might be. For retention studies we need to know the whole picture of activities, tutoring, and athletics. We just don't know what these students do outside the class that effects them."

This sample adequately reflects the appropriate ratio of the retention and attrition rates of the total population which had fifty percent attrition for the 1996-1997 academic year (see Table 2). This compares with a forty-seven percent attrition rate for all traditional aged students for the same year (see Table 3).

Table 2

Traditional Aged Students from Distances further than Forty Miles from Campus

Year	Total	Stopped	% Attrition	Total GPA	Stopped GPA
96-97	38	19	50%	1.91	1.36
95-96	36	16	44%	2.11	1.32
94-95	31	11	35%	1.25	2.21
93-94	30	11	37%	1.73	0.62
93-97	135	57	42%	1.75	1.38

Note. Total students represent those who identified themselves as graduating from a high school outside of a three county region surrounding the campus. Does not include GED students.

Comparing not only this particular year, but the past four years at this institution, there was no appreciable difference in student attrition rates for both populations. The rate of attrition is slightly lower for the students being studied than the total population in the same age group. Although this is contrary to original conjecture, the attrition of this population remains higher than the general population at this institution and could be decreased. Comparing these data with those of the general student population at the college was accomplished through reports recently generated by the financial aid office. For all students beginning Fall 1996, the year on which this study concentrates, 3,144 students enrolled with 2,064 students completing the Spring 1997 semester. Accounting for eighty-six students graduating in December 1996, the attrition rate was 32.5 percent. For the 1995-1996 year, the attrition rate for the institution was 33.02 percent.

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Table 3

Traditional Aged Students Attending a Community College

Year	Total	Stopped	% Attrition	Total GPA	Stopped GPA
96-97	502	234	47%	1.93	1.36
95-96	516	254	49%	2.18	1.48
94-95	504	251	50%	2.04	1.51
93-94	532	259	49%	1.97	1.47
93-97	2054	998	49%	2.03	1.46

Table 4

Reported Attrition Rates For All Students
August 1996 to May 1997

1995-1996 Enrollment and Attrition Figures	
Students Enrolled in the Fall 1995 Term	3204
Students Graduating in December 1995	82
Fall Students Completing Spring 1996 Term	2091
Federal Attrition Rate Reported	33.02%
1996-1997 Enrollment and Attrition Figures	
Students Enrolled in the Fall 1996 Term	3144
Students Graduating in December 1995	86
Fall Students Completing Spring 1996 Term	2064
Federal Attrition Rate Reported	32.5%

The general student population of the college had a substantially lower attrition rate than did the traditional age student, either coming from a local residence or a greater distance from the college (See Table 4).

Observations about students

One administrator had witnessed a number of students putting so much pressure on their parents to get away from the home that they reached a compromise situation by coming to a community college.

A secretary observed, "I've seen both, students who couldn't handle it and those who were always level headed. The ones who can't handle typical life problems eventually let their grades suffer. They drop out because of immaturity and a lack of direction."

Observations about parents

"For a parent to add the burden of living off campus is tough on the student. Some parents don't have any concept of what that does to a student," one secretary argued.

The dean affirmed, "any time there are additional barriers added, either by the students or outside, those additional stresses would have to adversely affect their performance."

"They (parents) are amazed at the low cost, especially when compared to a trade school or other institutions," noted an admissions employee.

The faculty representative stated that "parents from agricultural areas don't have a lot of confidence in their girl or boy, so they would rather test them out at a cheaper school. A community college is affordable when compared to a state or private school. It costs too much to take a chance on the kid."

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A counselor observed that "some have advanced degrees, but most don't have college experience."

The admissions employee who interacts with parents who have a college background stated that their questions center around living arrangements and the community.

Another administrator said that college educated parents will ask more probing questions, such as transferability of credits and academics, than parents who do not have college experience.

An employee who interacts consistently with these parents made these observations: "They assume the college will be taking care of their child. The more sophisticated parent will ask about college activities and other questions, but once they find a place for their child to live, the college does not have much contact with them. Generally parents will ask about how to find housing, but that is about as far as they go. They don't ask about services for their children. Sometimes they ask about meal plans or the cafeteria, but they don't ask about counseling, support services, or how to deal with a health problem. Parents are more concerned than students about housing. They don't think much beyond finding a house or apartment. Many students are the first of their family to attend college and their parents don't ask much."

Another administrator asserted, "I would be reluctant to send my children to this school from an outlying area."

"Personally I would never let my children do that, (live on their own for their first year of college), I would not want to throw up those additional barriers. Having a college experience myself makes a difference in those kinds of decisions for my children, most of the parents do not. They don't understand the type of commitment it takes to excel in college and do well."

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College Choice

Employee Responses:

Why do students coming from homes so far away choose a community college that has no residence systems or support?

One administrator responded, "Many of them are coming because we are their best choice for a number of different reasons."

Nonetheless, a long term employee observed, "some come as a lack of choice, for instance, they didn't get into the military, didn't get into the local mill, or didn't get into their chosen university, so they get stuck here. They didn't pick us, they just ended up here."

Employees confirm the trend of serving greater regions than our own county. One stated that, "we are moving more toward a regional college than a county college." Another observed that, "we tend to get a high percentage of this type of student than our counterparts in the region."

The dean shared these thoughts. "I do know of individual students who have come from counties far from our main campus. I would be reluctant to send my children to this school from an outlying area. Why do they come? Our academic programs are unique and cannot be obtained elsewhere in a wide region. The cost of credit is also lower than other institutions because we are the only community college serving this region."

An administrator observed, "frankly, we do not service those people very well, if at all. We do a disservice by going outside our immediate region into a broad area to recruit. Once students get here they find that services are not in place for living on their own. They expect more to be here than what there is."

Student Responses:

"I heard there was good schooling and I wanted to get into the Early Childhood Education program."

"I chose this college because of the low cost and it has a Parks and Recreation program. I like the atmosphere, it is a pretty and attractive campus."

One student was originally planning on going to the Air Force but was diagnosed as having dyslexia and had to abruptly change her plans. She joined some high school friends coming to the college for a specialized program.

Another student based the decision to attend this particular college because, as she conveyed, "the area looks like our hometown and where we're from. This is a large town, but not so big...like Cleveland or Chicago, so we can wean our way into a bigger city."

One student admitted, "my guidance counselor helped me immensely. I did not have enough money to take the test for nursing, so he paid for it. He believed in me that much."

Another student related that the choice to attend this college for Nursing over a nearby state university was influenced heavily by the guidance counselor. The counselor also assisted in the apartment search by obtaining a list from the area.

Students were asked if there had been a community college nearer to you, would you have gone there?

One student shared, "well, not in the larger city that is closer than here, even if they had a community college, because of the crime rate. But if there was one in a smaller town near me I would have. There was one across the state line, we had pamphlets and stuff from there, but it cost much more and we decided to come here."

Another student confirmed the importance of community colleges to students living in counties not providing a low cost alternative to university branch campuses.

"We have a branch campus of a major university right in our small town and they don't even accept all the credits from there to the main campus. Going there would not be a good idea, especially if we wanted to transfer to someplace else. They also make everyone stay on campus in one of the residence halls, even if you live one block away from campus. So you pay $1,000 to live in a dorm for one semester."

Housing Search

Employee Responses:

Admissions personnel observed,

"Parents are the most upset. First of all they have to find a room and they did not realize that was not part of the college's responsibility. Luckily, none have come back to say they could not come to school because they couldn't find a room someplace, but then we may not hear from those people. They honestly thought that the college should take more of a part in finding something for them."

The dean stated, "I stay out of that and keep the college out of those situations. Rental agreements are between them and the student, not the college. The college may be embarrassed by some student misbehaviors, but there is nothing we can do about that."

One administrator stated that the college does a minimal job at directing students to appropriate housing. "Should we have an approved housing list with inspections and relationships with landlords? Probably should, but who would do that? What criteria should be used?"

A secretary in the Admissions office acknowledged that only the minimum of service is provided. "We try to do what we can by providing maps and showing them locations. We give them booklets, and then recommend the newspaper listings.

Also, I tell them just to get an apartment, they may not be thrilled about it, but the student can make friends and can find something better later."

Employees note that, "...there just aren't that many places for students to stay close by. It is really a hit or miss situation. Students want an alternative to dorm life, most who come here aren't real crazy about being told what and when to do something. They want their own living arrangements as opposed to having a person who might be chosen as a roommate in a small room."

One administrator stated that "finding an apartment isn't that much of a problem. There isn't really a prejudice with race that I have heard of, it is more a question of gender, the male female thing. Females are perceived as being less trouble. Parents mostly help find the apartments. Most parents are concerned about finding a place close by than what the monthly rent is. Still, the price of the apartments in this area varies greatly."

The secretary who coordinates the housing list not only relates to parents and students, but also local house and apartment owners looking for students to rent from them.

"Landlords sometimes specify that they only want female or male. The housing list will only specify a preference, the decision has to be reached by the landlord and the student. That is really the only way to do that."

One of the secretaries stated, "There are problems with landlords, but I just refer them to the Office of Student Life. There used to be no one to refer them to."

The two problem areas described by administrators aware of such problems were; (1) parties, noise, and destruction of property, and (2) financial problems, late rent or nonpayment of a utility.

Student Responses:

One student exclaimed, "I thought there were dorms when I applied and was accepted, but found out there weren't any."

Students had mixed feelings on the ease of finding an apartment in a town unfamiliar with collegiate activities. "We called tons of places, thirty to forty, and only found two to look at. We even explained that we were from a small town and gave them references from teachers, ministers, and other people. All they saw were college kids who are party animals. We gave them references so they wouldn't be prejudiced, but they were anyway. The housing list we received from Admissions helped, that's how we found our apartment."

Another student told a similar story about another group seeking an apartment. "Four students from a small town fifty miles north looked for a house together. They had tons of problems because people from the community did not want to rent to college kids. They thought the students were just party animals and that was the end of the conversation over the phone."

"We understood that it was hard finding an apartment because other college students before us had ruined it for us, but that we still had to find an apartment," vouched another student.

Students are able to find apartments in the area, but need help in doing so. One student admitted, "My mother got involved and called the college to see if they had any services that could help us. It was at that point we met the Admissions secretary and she really helped us. She gave us a list of apartments and that is how we found the house we live in now. It's three stories and big enough to handle all of us."

One of the male students coming from a rural area related that the packet supplied by the college helped him get an apartment but that the long distance calls from his home sixty miles away really added up. He called numerous landlords but had little success until his aunt and mother got involved.

One of the female students described her search. "I needed to find an inexpensive apartment that was fairly safe and near the bus line. I found an apartment on the second call, my dad helped find it. My landlord is really good. For a relatively low monthly rent, the furnished apartment has three rooms, and includes all utilities except phone and cable."

Another female said she found an apartment in a small town over thirty miles away, but was still closer than her home fifty miles from campus. She lived with her fiancée and a friend, so there may have been other circumstances dictating the living conditions.

Two females moving into the city rooming together had a different perspective. "It was easy to find an apartment, but we were kicked out of the first one. My roommate really liked to have friends over to our place. She had parties pretty often. I'm different and like it quieter. Anyway, the landlord kicked us out of the first place because we were the only young people living in the building with a bunch of older folks. I guess there were a lot of complaints about us."

Students had further stories to describe relationships with their landlord. Some students had real difficulties in obtaining basic services. "Our landlord, the first semester, would take weeks to take care of a problem after we called him. In our second semester his mother became the new owner and took over. She always took care of the problem within two hours after we called her. She's great."

One of the student groups living together handled problems with their apartment in the following manner. "At first, one of the guys took care of all the stuff with the landlord. All the bills were in his name. Then it slowly evolved that we all would call her when something was needed. As it went on, all of us took on the responsibility."

Other landlords were described favorably. "My landlord treated me pretty well. He was real good to work with and I really had no complaints." Another student said, "my landlord was excellent, real nice about late rent or repairs and the apartment was only two blocks from Main Street."

Adjusting to College

Student Responses:

One student summarized her experience. "College classes were a lot different than I expected. The first semester was bad because I didn't take anything too seriously. Coming from a small town made it rougher, help from the college would have been good." Another student voiced, "I did average in my classes. Commuting was my main problem. I worked in a small town sixty five miles away and lived half way between campus and my job."

One young woman expressed her frustration, but accepted responsibility for the results of her actions. "I really disappointed myself by doing so bad in college. When I failed my Speech class, that really was the last straw; I was just doing too badly to continue. In college I just did average, not as good as I would like. Being away from home and trying to adjust to life is hard. I was a good high school student and I'm real disappointed in myself for doing so bad."

A student from a rural background replied. "A get-together with students from other communities right at the beginning would be helpful. I only knew two other people at the college from high school and I hardly ever saw them. Getting involved in the student government helped me meet new people."

One female, living on her own, declared, "I broke through my loneliness when I started school. I was here for a month before school started and there was no way to make friends."

One student shared her story of how she became comfortable with the college and community by becoming involved with a student organization. "The Gaming Guild[2] accepted me. I never felt accepted in this city until then. I felt alone, but then I found a whole group of people and we all had a common interest. People think negatively when they hear about this group, but there is nothing negative about gaming...it just explores the mind. I felt accepted for once. They really showed me around and made me feel much better about living here."

One other story about breaking through comes from a classroom experience. "When I started school, I found a few friends. One friend in my nursing class, just as alone as me, said he met some people and would I like to come and meet them. I said, "yeah." So I did and made a whole bunch of friends. That helped a lot. One good friend helped me find work. They also took me places. I got out of that shy rut I was in. I didn't know anybody and did not know how to act by myself."

One student, who lived with a group of her classmates from a small town, shared contrasting observations. "It was good to have a group, but without the Admissions secretary we would have been lost. There were nine of us from our high school and only one guy graduated before us. We all had college courses with someone from our group so we were never really alone. I thought everyone but our

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2. The Gaming Guild is a student organization that promotes and teaches various role playing games and exercises. It has developed its own culture and social structure within the context of the college. Members are accepting of any student willing to learn and try new games. Appearance and social status are not requirements for membership or acceptance.

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group was from this city. We only graduated in a class of 187, not over 500. If we had a problem, there was one of us that would help. We didn't need anyone else."

When students were asked about weekends, their responses were fairly consistent for the first semester. One student commented, "weekends really weren't a problem, I either went home or was so busy with friends that I was only in the apartment to sleep."

Others agreed with the first statement about going home every weekend; "I never have a problem with laundry, I go home every weekend."

Interestingly, students responded with a number of observations and suggestions for the college. "I have a number of friends who had problems their first year. College really didn't help much in life skills or with any of my problems. I didn't ask for help and had no knowledge about where to even go for help. It would have helped me to have a club or activities to meet with other people in apartments. I could have used other friends who were going through the same kinds of problems."

Employee Responses:

"Some do well, some don't. Adjusting socially is a real problem. Sexual activity, parties, and other activities really hamper academic life. Outside the classroom there are a lot of parties, students are not able to differentiate between party life and the classroom."

One administrator submitted that students, "encounter a lot of interpersonal problems that directly effect their performance in the classroom."

"Social activities interfere and students don't know how to handle that. They are really out there on their own."

A faculty member speaking of students he has had in class made the following observation. "Students don't know how to make friends with or network within the college. Even in good situations a student will leave if they are isolated. Two main reasons students fail is because of homesickness and lack of support."

Speaking directly about college instruction, one secretary argued that, "this is harder than high school, it takes a lot of discipline. Stress comes from wanting to do well, but not being able to do the work. Teaching styles can be completely different."

Another younger secretary was less sympathetic when she countered, "there is not a significant difference between the four year college and two year college for students in similar circumstances."

An administrator implied that there is a difference. "A smaller campus is more puzzling because students are limited to a smaller number of social activities and organizations. Activities are kind of difficult because no one wants to take a chance. Eighteen year olds are really not sure they want to get involved."

Roommates

Employee Responses:

The secretary of the admissions office related her feelings. "They (the students) ask me for roommates, which is really tricky. We're not matchmakers. I ask their permission to offer their names to others who are interested and then it is up to them."

Another secretary offered, "living with a roommate is even tougher. They aren't your brother or sister and can be completely different. Roommates can have a whole different set of friends than you, making life real difficult and awkward.

The assistant coach for the basketball team had many examples, but most recently he related, "last year our basketball players had a problem with a roommate situation forcing one kid to leave, after taking some things from others."

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One administrator admitted that roommate problems are the most common of all the problems these students have. Not paying their share of the rent, eating food they did not pay for, skipping a utility bill without telling their partner, and a multitude of other problems creates real conflict for young people struggling with basic life skills.

Student Responses:

Most students want a roommate or partner for one reason, namely to share expenses. "I had a roommate that shared the rent and other bills. She came from my high school with me. The rent was 377 dollars a month, too much for me alone, but with her to split it we did just fine that way." They can also share meals and transportation to the college.

Though, one woman asserted, "I like living alone and would not have a roommate." Another woman agreed, "Living with friends, I would worry about them wanting to do things when I need to study. There are too many conflicts and you lose friends that way."

Students from the same high school will band together in the same house in order to share expenses and help each other. Many of these groups are unsupervised, coed situations that have potential to expose these students to more than they, or their parents, expect. An administrator close to these students admitted, "when groups come down, they seem to have the most problems when they live together. They become unhappy with each other." A female representing one of the groups related her story. "Almost everyone from our small town lives at our house. Tom is two years older than the rest of us, kind of an adult figure, and handles some of the disputes and helps us sort things out. The first semester went real smooth. I mean, we hit bumps and stuff because we are different people, but we got along okay. Tom was like the judge and jury. Then we got a new roommate. It changed the mix a lot. Now there were three guys and two of us girls. The guy we brought in graduated with us from our home town, but if we would have taken a closer look at it, we would not have taken him. He had to be in control about everything and it made it really hard on all of us. He was constantly saying we were cheating him on his bills and we had to fight him to get his bills paid. Tom couldn't even handle this problem, we each had to speak to each other individually because we couldn't talk with him. The new guy would not listen to women and I had a real problem with him. I didn't stand for that because my mother taught me to treat people the same and he didn't like it that I talked back to him. I wasn't going to stand there and let him treat me like a dog. Even though we had problems with the one guy, the rest of us really stand by each other."

Basic Needs

Student Responses:

Beyond social and interpersonal problems, students expressed concerns about their physiological needs. One 'country boy' related, "it was hard to adjust to city life at first. I lived near the hospital and the ambulances always blew their sirens which made it hard to sleep. The city noise was a lot different from the country."

One student summed up her experience by stating, "the first semester was real rough. Learning to live on my own and taking on the responsibilities was tough." Another student related, "finding groceries and food was difficult because I wasn't near any thing." One of the female students living on her own related, "I really didn't eat very good for a long time. I ate real good on weekends when I went home and brought lots of leftovers with me."

The climate of this city in the northeastern part of the country did not help these students either. "Winters really did get bad. I always started out for classes early. Sometimes I got to the college an hour early, but I didn't care. I just made sure that I was here on time."

Even more serious were the resultant health problems these students experienced as a result of their life style and poor eating habits. A female student shared that her second semester was different because, "well, I got sick over the break with my gall bladder, it was pretty serious." The male student from a rural area had his own story about how illness just about ended his first semester prematurely. "I got pneumonia helping my uncle bring in hay on the farm and really got sick. I didn't know how sick and just stayed in my apartment...missed classes and really put me behind. I didn't go to a doctor until later. The college health insurance helped, but I really didn't know what to do about it."

Another problem that students encounter is transportation. One student related,

> "Now that I have my car, my life is much easier. I got it the end of the second semester. I actually won it through the Vo-Tech I was attending for perfect attendance, but my parents car broke down and they couldn't get to work. I let them use mine since I could use the bus to get to school. They got their car fixed after a year of saving and now I have mine back. Having a car helped me get a job and not be so locked in to my apartment, but now I have gas, repairs, and car insurance to worry about."

Having an automobile is important to most students, but it is not the only form of transportation. The city does run a bus system which includes the college on one route, but it does not run in the evenings and has a limited area of operation. One student affirmed, "busses are available, but they don't run in the evenings and I can't take an evening class." Students not owning a vehicle must find an apartment near the bus line. "I had to ride the bus or find someone with a car to take me." Another student was more adamant about the bus. "The bus is very important, there is no way I could make it to the college without the bus. I don't have a car and just got rides from others. I really felt alone, without a vehicle I was stuck in the apartment most of the time."

The Office of Student Life helps these students by offering discounted tokens for the bus. "The bus tokens and the bus helped me a lot. I would not have been able to attend the college without it." Other students find more creative, but less reliable ways to get to classes. "I had to improvise a little bit, but once I started making friends, they would pick me up and it got a lot easier."

When asked if they ever felt in danger or unsafe, several female students shared these stories. "Oh yeah, living by myself, you can't believe how many times I go to make sure my door is locked. I have two doors in my apartment that I check constantly. Thankfully I live on the top floor so I know that people can't go up my window or anything." One female, when thinking about her safety, insisted, "you don't ever admit that you live by yourself."

One student recounted this story about her safety. "And now that I have my car down here, I have to park a little ways from my apartment and sometimes, with my new job, I have to leave at night. People hang around that area and it isn't safe. There is supposed to be a curfew, but it isn't followed. One time there was a group of guys by my car and there was no way I was going to go out there. I called my work and told them I was going to be a little late and asked my neighbor to walk me out. He's an Army recruiter and he walked me out because I wouldn't walk out on my own. I finally got brave enough to ask for help because I had to, I didn't want to ask anyone for help. I just wanted to be alone, but I did get help."

In an interview asking a female if she feared for her own safety at any time, she answered by sharing about a local murder that made headlines for months. "One incident that really scared me was when a local eighteen year old male was killed at one of the shopping malls. His death and publicity about it really shook me up. (He was an eighteen year old man that was kidnapped from a local mall and found murdered about two weeks later. Since he was the son of a prominent business man, the case was covered by all regional media.)"

Conversely, one of the females speaking about her situation living in a group, added these comments. "The only real problem I had was with the guys watching over us girls. If we didn't check in with them, or tell them that we were going to be late, they really got upset. Especially Tom, he was horrible. It was like living with my mother again. But I really never was that afraid or threatened."

Employee Responses:

A sympathetic admissions secretary, who these students come to know first and is usually the most trusted of college employees, has firsthand knowledge of their problems. "When these students get sick, there is no one to tell them what to do. They will stop in and say they aren't feeling well and there isn't much I can do. I do encourage them to call their parents or find a doctor who will see them. Students come to me for a variety of reasons and I try to help them when I can."

The dean admitted, "the added burden of living off campus by oneself at such a young age inevitably throws up additional considerations that make their adjustment more difficult." Another employee observed, "when a stove or furnace breaks down, things don't get fixed in a timely manner like in a residence hall, a safe place where things are more or less done for you. So I think they have a lot more things that distract them from their studies."

One administrator stated that transportation is a factor but, "I would suspect that most students either have their own car or have access to a vehicle in their group. Not that many rely on the bus." Nonetheless, the office of student life sells almost one thousand bus tokens are sold each month the college is in session. At a four year institution they would not have the privilege of having an individual vehicle until their junior, or maybe their sophomore year. "It may not be the number one reason to choose a community college over a four year school, but having their own car is a factor for some students."

An employee observed that, "this area has a reputation as being safe. For that reason it's okay for their child to stay here." The admissions secretary shared a story she heard only after the incident was months old, as usually happens. "There were two nursing students from a small town eighty miles away who always went home on the weekends. A man made advances on them constantly, as a matter of fact, he was their landlord. Not only did he harass them, but he really treated them horribly. Magically, his name never appeared on the apartment list again. We really didn't do any more than keep his name off the list, but those girls were lucky nothing worse happened." Unfortunately, this incident was not reported to the authorities and no one in the college knew about it until much later.

Money and Budgets

Employee Responses:

One employee shared the following perceptions as a result of counseling a number of students living in apartments. "College life and apartment living becomes too expensive. They move out of the apartment and move home, trying to save money but it is too much for them. I have seen students run out of money half way through the semester. The pressure and guilt of failing is extremely debilitating, we never see them again."

A professor submitted, "so they drop out of school or they get jobs and their grades go down. They slack through the semester if they stay and do very poorly."

The admissions director affirmed the same findings. "Outside the classroom, the main issue I hear about is money, budgeting, or the lack of budgeting. These students have cable television, but have to struggle for food and the basics. They have no sense of priorities or how to handle money. Or a roommate leaves and now they have to pick up the extra costs when they couldn't pay for their own share before."

A secretary admitted, "I have lent money out, but only to a student I absolutely know personally, I don't do that often."

Student Responses:

A successful student related, "that [money] got really bad, I learned how to save a penny real good. That's basically the biggest problem I had." Conversely, another student admitted, "I'm taking a year off. Saving up some money because I just couldn't afford everything." Trying to compensate by getting a job, one woman shared that she worked thirty hours a week at a small town an hour away from campus and carried twelve credits which is considered full time. She was another who dropped out and is not planning to come back.

A woman living in an apartment had this to say about her friends. "They don't know how to manage their money. They say, I have money...let's go! But I can't do that. I'd love to, but not until I get a paycheck. I have to save this for that and can't dip into that account or else I won't be able to live for a month."

Speaking about the specific expenses and types of income most of the students encountered, a student shared these thoughts. "Because I not only had school bills, I had home bills. I had rent and phone bills along with books and everything else. My scholarship only covered books and tuition, nothing else. It was a month and a half before any other money came in. It was really slow, the first check came in late. Then the next check came in a couple of weeks late. I thought I wasn't going to make it."

Students come to depend on financial aid, not just for courses and academic supplies, but for their subsistence. "Actually, Financial Aid could be improved. It takes forever to get help. I know I was trying to get things settled for a whole year to finally get my grant stuff to get approved. Thank God I got a scholarship, it took forever to get my grant money. I mean, they have to understand they have to make sure the student is going to come and everything, but we had to wait a month and a half before we even got any money in. Thank God I had the scholarship or everything would have been messed up."

Emotional Needs

Student Responses:

"Loneliness...I've seen many people who are lonely and want to meet people and get involved, but don't know how. Living by yourself is tough."

A student summed up his feelings by saying, "I just didn't know anybody." One woman described her most profound obstacles. "Finding things and getting to know people were the two main challenges. I didn't know anyone when I came here. Did not know where anything was, I had to learn the bus schedule. God, my phone bill was high that month." A student who had to drop out acknowledged, "I wasn't ready for college or living on my own."

Students who successfully break into the community shared that it was not easy and took courage to disclose themselves to others. "I had to get to know these guys before I ever told them. When I first came down here there were other people, even people from my own high school, but I never see them. Sometimes at the bookstore or whatever, but normally, we never see each other. I never considered having them as a roommate."

Students eventually find each other, on campus and out in the community. Making a friend who is experiencing the same obstacles helps overcome isolation. "I met other students in the same situation as I was. There was one student in the same apartment building as me. He lived on the other side, so that helped me make friends of the people over there."

Community members can also assist these students by filling voids they don't readily admit to themselves. "I finally got brave enough to introduce myself to my next door neighbor. Now she looks out for me, she is like a mother to me."

Many students went home on weekends. "I went home every weekend until I got to know some people. Never had to worry about laundry until later."

"It was hard, this last year, but I managed," declared one proud, but tired student. At the end of each interview, students were asked what they learned from the past year. Both, those who succeeded and those who had to leave learned important lessons that should be shared with high school students intending to attend next year. "The biggest thing I learned in this last year is asking for help, not being ashamed of asking for help," asserted one female who lived by herself. A male student made an introspective observation affirmed, "I have matured more in this last year by living on my own than my friends who are still living at home." Assertiveness was also a trait that successful students had to master. "Also, putting your foot down

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when things are not the way you have it planned. To say, "hey, this is not the way I have it worked out." To be able to say no and not let your friends, family, or other people run your life for you. This is my life, let me do it! That was my biggest thing...actually sticking up for myself. I got in the habit of letting my friends and family run my life. I finally told everyone that this is not going to be the way it is. I'm going to set my own goals and meet them."

A similar story was told by another student who lived on her own and came through her own obstacles in order to succeed in life and academically. "The biggest problem I had were the friends I made. They like to pop in because I had my own apartment and they didn't. They stopped in all the time. It got to the point where I had to say, "you are my friends, but do not come here." I even locked the door and didn't let them come in. They got mad at me, but they got over it. I finally put my foot down and told them I have work to do and no, you cannot come over. That was my biggest problem. I used to have to stay up, sometimes real late, until they left and then do my school work. They just didn't know when to leave."

A young woman leaving in the midst of her second semester told about her experience. "There were positive things that happened, it wasn't all bad. I really liked working in the child care center, the exposure to children was great. I intend to come back some day, once I get my life together."

One of the students admitted, "I've seen both, the students who couldn't handle it and those who were always level headed. My grades suffered and I eventually dropped out. Just immaturity and a lack of direction."

Employee Responses:

When asked to describe any special problems students have, an employee conveyed the feelings of many first semester students. "They're lonesome. Trying

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their wings in a lot of ways they aren't ready to." Another observed, "Some of them are pretty good students. Not all get discouraged."

Some members of the college community expressed little sympathy for these students. "They are adults now," declared one administrator. A faculty member agreed, "it's too much for them, they lose their grip back home and they become lost in a lot of ways. Home is different for them now, friends are leaving the area, getting married. Life goes on without them and if they dwell on that too much and not on their own lives, they really feel lonely and question why they are here."

"Young students who move here are not really at home, they are not really at school. Especially the eighteen year olds, they don't ever adopt a separate life."

Summarizing these observations, another faculty member submitted these thoughts about the inability to adapt to new surroundings. "These people don't ever develop a life in this county. Their life and their activities center back home. They don't attach themselves to the town. They don't get a life here. They don't give it much of a chance."

"Students hesitate to participate in activities and many have jobs back home. Slowly they get away from that, but they are still tied at home." A faculty member stated, "they miss class on Friday...sometimes come in late on Monday. They really try to boil the school week down to three days. After all, if they were on a campus where they were forced to stay, it would be better for them and us." The dean agreed with the frustration of the faculty by responding, "it takes thirty to thirty-five hours of commitment for fifteen hours of college credit...that is a full time job. Most parents without a college education do not understand that."

Employees have observed student success and failure over the years and share these thoughts. "Sometimes a student puts so much pressure about wanting to get away from the home that they reach a compromise situation by coming to a community college." "What I hear is that these students want to go away from home, but they don't want dorm life." "Students are either frightened or overly confident, wanting to get away from home. Students graduating from the local high school have enough problems, these students coming from far away have even more. That first semester is a major transition."

Employees further observed that, "to throw other burdens on a student such as living off campus shows me that parents don't have any concept of what that does to a student." "But, any time there are additional barriers added, either by the student or outside, those additional stresses would have to adversely effect their performance."

Perceptions from the classroom are expressed by this professor. "They develop a lot of bad habits, get into a bad crowd. They are too young, not ready to be on their own. These students don't have the money or resources. They disappear, we never see them again." The dean expressed his general feelings about these students. "My gut feeling is that they do have a higher representation of academic failure. Initially there would be a higher instance of academic problems. Basically, most students have priority problems. Where does school fit into the realm of their world? They have got to have a car, cable television, and all these things...and yet they are still going to school."

Students also survive and do fine, according to some reports. One secretary who, as a young freshman lived in a residence hall, observed, "I don't think that these students have any different grades than other students living at home. Grades are situational, they depend upon the person."

An administrator stated that, "students living at home with their families don't have a corner on success, especially if they lack maturity. These students are usually the ones always thinking about how to get away with things. Local parents call concerned about their children who live in the same house as much as parents call about children living in an apartment miles away."

Community Relations

Student Responses:

Students were affected differently by community members. One student commented that, "I was treated good by the neighborhood where I lived, no problem really." Another student noted mixed reactions to a new person in the community. "Some treated me really good, they went out of their way to help me find things. Others were stuck on themselves, like they were better than you because you weren't from around here, foreign to them. So I got an equal balance of both."

When asked for a specific example of how an out of town student was treated, one woman shared this experience. "My neighbor really helped me out. I told her that I was Catholic and did not know where to go to church. She literally got me in the car and took me to where I needed to go."

About our own students, the same student shared, "I was friends with all the other students, there was no prejudice from the students here. I made many friends."

On the other hand, one student submitted this story. "I asked where a dentist was located. I knew he was on Main Street, but couldn't find the office. I asked three or four people, but no one would answer. All they said was that they did not know. I had to go to a business to find out. Other than that incident community people treated me okay. I wouldn't want to live here though, it is too big."

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One female stated, "the neighborhood looks run down, but the people are nice. They look after us and the house, even when we're gone for the weekend."

Speaking of student perceptions of college employees treating them differently, one student stated "none of the employees or professors treated me any differently than anyone else. Of course, I already said that I didn't tell many people that I was not from around here."

Another student shared this. "A lot of people in this city really didn't know where I was from. They thought our town was extinct. Some people were real interested in where we were from. One of the professors would ask me my opinion on stuff because I was from a small town and had very little contact with others. We only had two families that were Black and two that were Oriental...that was it."

Employee Responses:

Speaking of the community and our students, an employee made these additional comments. "Students from out of town don't party as much because they don't have the contacts to have a party. This area is arrogant, not the friendly place it is made out to be. People are kept out of the mainstream for three generations."

An administrator recounted another story. "There were apartments built within walking distance of the college and many college students rented there because it was so convenient. Regardless, they refuse to be listed on the apartment list because a group of basketball players just trashed the apartment, something like five thousand dollars worth of damage. They destroyed the possibility of students ever renting there again. That kind of thing really affects public relations for the college." "There was another party that had over 150 people show up that made the local news. People in the community remember that kind of thing for a long time," conveyed a secretary.

One employee, summarizing numerous conversations with community members maintained, "residents resent out of county students coming into this community. Mostly older people don't like our tax dollars going out for these reasons."

College Services

Student Responses:

Students responded, not by asking for a residence hall, but for simple services the college could provide. A number of them mentioned orientation. "Other colleges provide services, especially orientation. Four year students have a better start."

Other students agreed, "More activities to make the transition from high school to college is important." "Having a mixer for us would help. We don't know who else lives in apartments." "Letting the students know when and where the services are offered are important." Students also expressed gratitude for acts of support that were taken by college employees. "The admissions secretary helped all four of us get jobs on campus. We were in Admissions, Student Life, Child Care, and Continuing Education. She is just like our mom. She looked after us and checked up on us. One time my roommate and I were in a car accident on our way home to our families and she called right away to ask if we were okay."

"The director of student life and one of the counselors helped by being there for me and letting me talk through problems. The college did not provide services, but it was nice to know that someone was there to listen." Another student expressed, "there are too many employees to list who help students. I guess it depends on the student and who they have an association with." "Did the college or employees help in any way? Well actually the student life guy helped me a lot because he was always around and if I needed anything or talk, he was good about that."

Employee Responses:

In the student life office, the secretary relates to students closer than most employees. "They will talk to me because I'm not a parent and I'm not really one of their friends. They have confided things in me that are unbelievable. I can be objective and provide a reality check. Just listening is important. They see me as more of a peer than an employee of the college. The authority posture does not work. I hear more about parent problems, not much about apartments."

One faculty member, who was one of the first faculty hired by the college thirty years ago, had interesting comments about how he relates to these particular students. "I'm strongly intuitive. I can almost pick these people out the first day of class. I need to stress that they are really lonely. It's the first time in their life that they have been alone. Occasionally I will get an advisee from out of the area, but usually I get to know these students informally. It is easy to begin a conversation with these students since I come from the same rural area as they do. When I run into somebody who comes from one of those areas, I have something to talk about."

One administrator attested, "this could be a full time position, I mean coordinating housing, but I doubt we will ever get that." To back up that statement, another administrator noted the need for further investigation, "wish we had a person dedicated to serve that population. A study about this population would prove that retention of these students would provide income for this person."

The admissions director admitted, "there are many students who go through and do fine, but there are many who drop out or become discouraged. What could we as a campus do better? I don't know...good issue." From the same office, another employee agreed, "I have never read about a college that offered services. There is

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one satellite campus of a large university that doesn't have dorms, but gives assistance and a map to help find something. That's about it."

One administrator held that. "we do well serving athletes and international students. There are services and support for these students." Yet, "international students are really time consuming." The admissions secretary confessed, "I've been doing housing for ten years and am glad to say that there hasn't been anything so bad that it hasn't been handled by the director of student life or the dean. We've been lucky."

There is also undocumented personal contact that employees have with these students, one aspect is described by one of the employees. "Personal counseling and advice has happened periodically with those folks trying to sort out priorities and what it means in terms of long term success or careers. The eighteen year old that has that thought out is rare, most have a great need."

Employees also agreed with students about the need for a good orientation, "orientation at four year colleges is required and more extensive, ours is not the same or as intense."

The director of enrollment management was more direct in assisting students at the beginning. "What would be the best possible service we could provide these students? Required orientation for everybody not living with their parents. Talk about the problems they will encounter. Landlord relations, academic consequences, and other potential obstacles. Point out the realities of their new life."

When asked if there was a philosophy, formal or informal, that guides official action toward young students living on their own, the dean of students summarized his thoughts. "No, there is nothing written about how we should treat these students, but we have discussed the situation within the student services division. This institution has not provided additional resources, but we keep recruiting them. We should formulate a policy in the near future, but I am not sure we will. Meanwhile, our institution will continue to expand and recruit further and further. Some community colleges have dedicated personnel to meet those needs, I don't know that we will."

This simple answer summarized the attitudes of the employees ,"but to give them the best shot to leave here happy and pleased," showed the kind of relationship an institution wishes for its students.

State System Obstacles

Employee Responses:

"We are essentially a commuting campus. A campus environment, in terms of activities and functions, enticing students to stay here are less than you would find at a four year institution. For students to identity with the campus is a real problem with our students."

Developmental issues of the typical eighteen year old also influence the kinds of service that can be offered. "Support systems will help those who seek help, but there are many who won't seek it. More likely, they will try out their wings and try things on their own. The availability of support systems is very important. Some students are mature enough to seek out support...for those that do, it does wonders."

Commenting on the lack of support services at this college, an employee made this statement. "Absolutely, there is less a support system for these students at community colleges. Four year institutions have housing offices and residence support systems. What do we do? We give out a booklet about the community and do sporadic counseling...not much."

Other community colleges seem to have similar problems according to employee interviews. "It is a product of economics. The funding formula for this state for community colleges needs major revamping. It just does not work well. Community colleges are forced to seek as many Full Time Equivalent (FTE) students as they can, both credit and noncredit, in order to get reimbursement from the state. Every community college in this state will continue looking for more students. More will come from outlying areas."

"This issue is frustrating for two year institutions. We are close to a crisis. It is a credible issue. I wish we had data on this subject. I can only rely on my own experience," expressed the dean when speaking about young students living on their own.

When the admissions director was asked, he did not know any answers either, but was willing to ask others. "I'll ask what other community colleges do, put it on the agenda. One community college in our state does have dorms, but this will be interesting to get a perspective." He did pose the question of what do colleges do for their young students renting in the community and received no answers from his colleagues about this subject.

Residence Hall

Employee Responses:

Without asking a specific question about a college sponsored residence hall, employees offered their feelings and suggestions on the subject. There are a few apartments within walking distance to the college, however... "the basketball coach has those apartments closest to the college pretty much sown up. Can't blame him, he's looking out for his players."

The need for student housing close to the college was mentioned a number of times. "This happens in every college town, there are usually apartments right across

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the street from the college. There are opportunities for the noncredit side of the house."

"Parents want housing close to the college. We don't have anything, but I always think about a place right down here across the street. An entrepreneur could build and fill it with our students." "If we had something like a block building nearby, it would be great for our students. There were some influential men interested in renovating an old building for apartments for our students, but it fell through for some reason. It was a shame that opportunity was lost." "I think that would be a win-win situation for everyone. As a college we could support a project like that. If there was land or a building close to the college, that would be a great way to help these students in their transition to the college."

"It seems to me that we know the community well enough to be able to get some entrepreneurial activity to come up with some residence or group living for our students."

Police Reports

The local newspaper includes police reports from the whole county each day. For each perpetrator and victim listed, the name, address, and age is included (See Table 5). All police departments are contacted, the State Police, City Police, and surrounding townships and municipalities. In reviewing these reports for the 1996-1997 academic year, over fifty names were identified in the targeted age group (eighteen to twenty year olds). Of those fifty, only four could be identified as current students attending this community college. Three were involved in vehicle accidents and one received a citation for driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI). None of these particular students were identified as commuting or living on their own. The

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addresses listed were all local and the names were not listed on any of the commuting or apartment listings developed for this project.

Table 5

Local Police Reports of Traditional Age Students
August 1996 to May 1997

County Wide Police Department Reports	
Total Number of Instances Involving Traditional Age Students	52
Number of Community College Students Involved	4
Instance Descriptions of Students	
Vehicle Accidents	3
Driving Under the Influence (DUI)	1

V. DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study examined perceived difficulties traditional aged students living on their own encounter when attending a community college that has no residence support systems. In order to determine these perceptions, the following questions were investigated: (1) Do these students have a higher instance of academic problems than other students attending the same college? (2) What are the problems these students encounter? (3) Does this college offer special services for this population? (4) What are these services, if any are offered? (5) Do these young students perceive their needs are being met?

Data were obtained by the use of open ended questions during interviews of both students and employees, examination of academic records, and summaries of local police reports. One community college was investigated during one academic year, creating a single site case study. Because these data were unpredictable and complex, qualitative methodology was implemented for this investigation. For this subject, this methodology illuminated multiple issues which may not have been uncovered by other methods. Although there were findings confirming conventional wisdom among community college professionals, there were others which contradict anecdotal knowledge indicating greater complexities and other problems. This study represents only a small addition to a comprehensive understanding of the needs that traditional age students at community colleges have in order to attain academic success.

This chapter is divided into four sections: The first section includes an analysis of the results presented in Chapter IV following the sequence of research questions posed at the beginning of this study. A second section discusses the context in which the results of this study belong according to the theories presented in Chapter II. The third section presents recommendations for this college and all community colleges as interpreted from the results. Finally, the fourth section suggests areas of further study and summarizes conclusions of the study.

Analysis

Research questions

- Do young college students living on their own while attending a non-residential community college have a higher rate of academic problems in their first year than other young students within the same setting?

Unfortunately, many students don't make it. Fifty percent of the Fall 1996 seventeen to nineteen-year-old freshmen who are coming from non-commutable distances don't finish their first year (see Table 2). Over the past four years, 1993 to 1997, the total attrition for this population is forty-two percent. Compared to students the same age at the same institution, these students actually fared better during the same four year period. Attrition for all traditional aged students was forty-nine percent (see Table 3). Traditional age students who began in Fall 1996 had a lower attrition rate, forty-seven percent, than the same students coming from homes more than forty miles away, fifty percent. That difference is negated when examined in the four year period of 1993 to 1997. In comparison, the grade point averages (GPA) in a four year period show that seven percent more students from out of town do better than their counterparts of the same age. In spite of that information, a forty two percent attrition rate for the past four years with fifty percent for the most recent year shows that this population needs assistance to achieve their goals.

Essentially, the analysis of attrition rates and grade averages does not conclusively prove that this population of students has any greater problem than the total population of traditional age students at this institution. These students do better, at least in completing the first year, than their counterparts of the same age. The problem of attrition is highlighted when comparing the traditional age student population with the general student population (See Table 4). When 32.5 percent of all student attrition rates for the 1996-1997 academic year are compared to fifty percent for the population on which this study focused, a tangible difference is realized. These particular students have a more difficult time completing one year of college than students the same age. With a 17.5 percent difference in attrition, this institution has the opportunity to address certain needs of this population to improve the retention of these students.

Many students who know others from their high school want to stay in groups. Not many are couples or with a family, and most end up living alone. The admissions office can identify at least four different groups of students from outlying areas living in a local apartment or rental house. Anecdotal information from two employees about the long term success rates of students is that students who end up commuting long distances to attend college seem to do better than students who move into the local area. Perhaps this is because students who commute retain their support systems. Students moving into the college community break ties with a known support system, spending considerable energy fending for themselves or creating a new support system. Without investigating these students through research, one cannot prove or disprove this anecdotal observation.

The first three weeks are critical to student persistence in college (Drew, 1990, Gardner & Upcraft, 1989, & Tinto, 1987). If they do not connect to someone or a group within those first consequential weeks, most students will leave. This is even more distressing to students living by themselves for the first time. The sense of failure these students feel is palpable. They feel alone with no one to turn to, and yet they helped make the decision to attend the college so they have too much pride to ask for help...until it is too late.

- What are the problems young students living on their own encounter?

Why don't students succeed and why do all have a rough time when they first move to this city in order to attend this college? More than anything else, the answer most common is loneliness. The most intense comments made by students and employees concerned this subject. Most students were reluctant to admit their feelings or tried to forget these feelings. Students who stopped coming were the ones who made the strongest comments, which supports cited research. Even those students living with one roommate had problems with this issue, those living in groups did not but had different issues.

Transportation was an important issue for the survival of a student, but the perspectives between employees and students differed. Employees thought the privilege of having their own car might be a reason to attend a community college, even if one has to live on their own. One employee has observed that students can have more freedom by having a car. Students were more interested in getting to the college and, for the most part, saw the car as a necessary burden to that end. More student comments related to additional expense than the prestige of owning a vehicle. Some employees were convinced that having a vehicle was an issue important enough to decide on this college. Student interviews did not support that view.

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A concern more serious than any other discussed was security. Although the males interviewed had little concern, they are certainly not immune from the dangers of being alone in a new city. Parents have the perception that this locality is safe, most likely because it is not an inner city or have a reputation as being crime ridden. Parents do ask about safety, more so about their daughters than the young men. They ask about the community and the campus.

Women did share a number of stories that enlighten how they were affected. These stories were disturbing to employees, who many times feel powerless to help students. Many times off campus troubles are reported much later or college policy prevents direct action. However, most employees are connected to the community enough to call someone who can help the student when the incident is serious. One public occurrence did take place that woke up college students. To parents in the region, this normally quiet city lost its reputation for being a safe place, at least for a short period of time. College students, of which some were close friends of the victim, were visibly shaken.

In spite of the obstacles described so far, if students complete the first few weeks, the most damaging obstacle new students encounter which prevents them from completing their first year is budgeting problems. Of students interviewed who dropped out, some admitted that they ran out of money to live on their own and go to college. Observers of these students agree. Students have a hard time budgeting their time and money, they have more responsibility than they have ever had before. Students get themselves into such serious financial predicaments that it is difficult not to feel sorry for them. Even though they make decisions that create problems, few are prepared to make budgeting decisions when they first move from their families.

Other than a parent, distanced by location to an adolescent with a natural inclination toward independence, there is no one assigned or available to assist them.

Sometimes, having a roommate helps, especially at first. Still, people change and make new friends, leaving the other person in the apartment on their own. Unlike residence halls, there is no one assigned to help resolve conflicts and the issues are usually more severe. Groups of students usually do fairly well for the beginning half of the first semester, but then the interpersonal problems of more than two older adolescents living in the same environment become overwhelming. Rarely is the second semester less difficult than the first and by the end of the first year, the original group has fragmented and grown apart.

For the most part, when students were asked how neighbors and community members reacted to them, they responded with positive stories and comments. Not all residents are pleased with out of county students attending the college and living in the area. Add that sentiment to some bad publicity of a student arrest or a party that got out of hand and the community can turn against these students, and the college, fairly rapidly. Even so, the college has no plans or procedures to prevent or manage off campus problems. This lack of policy creates a situation that permits bitter community sentiment toward the college through a few disruptive students.

Instructors often realize who these students are and become less tolerant of extended weekends. If students do not connect more with the local community and campus by the middle of the semester, they begin spending more time traveling back to their family homes. This usually occurs at the same time academic pressures are building with mid semester and final grades being determined.

The topics which were not expressed were as interesting as those that were expressed in the interviews. The author's past experience with this population of students include unplanned pregnancies, drug use, police involvement at parties, underage drinking violations, expulsions from apartments, parental interference and abuse, and other serious predicaments. Former students, both successful and those who dropped out, related extremely serious events they experienced while living on their own. These types of events were not mentioned in the course of the interviews. The impetus for this study came from personal counseling and disciplinary actions resulting from young students living on their own in local apartments. Knowing that these behaviors occur, it was puzzling not to have them expressed in the interviews. That the interviewer was involved in this study and is also an administrator at the institution could have inhibited complete disclosure on the part of the interviewees.

Police records did not reveal any criminal activities for this population for the year examined. However, there have been activities which were reported in the past, as expressed by two of the employees, but none were reported this year. For this particular academic year to be spotless in the police reports for the entire county was fortunate for the institution, but should not be expected in the future. Past students have been deceived and used by students from the local area for parties, drug and alcohol distribution, and sexual encounters. To have such a quiet year is either an aberration or the institution's employees are not hearing of these more serious events.

- Does this community college provide special services for this population?

All interviews and evidence depict services for these students as sporadic, unorganized, informal, and minimal. Only students who seek out this information receive any, and of those who need it, many do not make efforts to find it. Fewer than half of students living in local apartments sought out a college employee for help in finding local accommodations. Many students found their living arrangements on their own without any college advice or support. Booklets about student living are distributed through the admissions office to those who ask for assistance and in literature racks in the student union. Over two-thirds more booklets are distributed from the racks than are given out by the admissions secretary or the office of student life. Because of this distribution system, it is known that the booklets are popular, but popular with whom is unknown.

These students do not want to be identified as being different. They are adolescents with intense motivations, at least for most, to fit in with their peers. Separating them or causing them to be perceived as different can be damaging to their social acceptance. Women living alone, in particular, do not want to be identified for security reasons. They are rightfully careful about letting others know that they live in an apartment by themselves. For these reasons, the college must be creatively cautious in creating services by which these students can safely and socially participate.

Attending a commuter campus which has few accommodations near the campus creates a challenge in finding a convenient place to live. When this community college was created in the 1960's, no one envisioned that this commuter college would serve young students coming from so far away. The original intent was for the college to serve students from the county in which it is found and supported. With more students attending from a greater region, transportation no longer becomes a nuisance but a necessity.

Not only do administrators from other community colleges have little knowledge of any services provided, but they are reluctant to speak on the subject with other institutions. The dean of students, the director of student life, and the director of admissions asked their colleagues at other community colleges what, if any, services their institutions provided these particular students and all came back with very little information. It seems that most community colleges are unaware of the needs students have regarding these issues, prefer to ignore them, or do not share this information outside their institutions. In reviewing the literature for this study, it was apparent that a gap regarding residence issues at community colleges exists.

- What are these services, if any are offered?

Employees responded strongly about the need to improve services for these students. After numerous experiences with young students struggling to survive college and apartment life, personnel who work closely with students become advocates for them. Indeed, this study was prompted by numerous instances of discipline problems and personal counseling with traditional age students living in local apartments. It seemed as though these particular students were more prone to serious problems than other students the same age. Nonetheless, it may be that local students have the same problems but have other support systems than college personnel to help them with those problems. If that is the case, then perceptions that these students have more problems than their peers may be mistaken. They may just interact with college personnel more often. It may also signify that college personnel, in place of distant family or friends, need to fulfill these needs for students in order for them to persist in college.

The institution does provide limited service to students living on their own services such as booklets, apartment lists, and informal contact with employees. Not only was liability on the college's part implied as a reason to limit these services, but resources for this service were questioned. Despite these challenges, students who did obtain a housing list often come back the second year to obtain an updated one. The list is not complete, but it is at least a place to start their search. Although the college provides the housing list, it does not endorse it and has disavowed any responsibility for its contents. Landlords and local home owners will call the Admissions office to be placed on the list that they know will be distributed to students who request it. The college does not solicit or seek housing information, it has to be volunteered to the admissions office who coordinates and distributes the list.

The Student Living booklet is another valuable resource which students helped to create a number of years ago. This booklet describes basic landlord/tenant rights, how to find a doctor or dentist, where grocery stores and laundromats are located, and other basic information. It is written to young students living on their own for the first time. Young students living away from home will not ask for this resource, but when it is placed in public magazine racks the booklets naturally disappear. Over 400 of these booklets are published annually and they disappear from display racks. Other than the list of rentals and the booklet, the college provides no formal aid.

Informally, a number of college employees assist these students whenever they can. Just listening is helpful for many students. In the development of an adolescent, their independence is important. Offering advice has to be accomplished with subtlety.

Sometimes just listening to a student talk through problems is all they need or want. Money is lent to students in dire need by employees who interact with them daily. Sometimes a business card is given to a student as a reference to find an apartment. There are also times when an employee will call a community agency to refer the student for assistance or a job. All of these services are informal, extra considerations not required of any employee, but accomplished on the part of a student in need.

- Do young students living on their own while attending a community college perceive their needs are being met?

Most students are reluctant to admit needing help or identifying themselves as someone who does. For this reason, most of their needs never surface to administrators who formulate policy. Most students with overwhelming needs leave the college before ever admitting them to a college professional. As mentioned previously, other needs are met informally or by outside sources. College officials rarely encounter or quantify needs expressed by students because there are no formal policies or procedures that record them. The main challenge for this study was seeking information which is not mentioned or revealed through main stream reporting structures. This college officially only provides academic support counseling. There are no personal counselors defined in any job description. This does not infer that personal counseling does not take place, but there is no place it is reported, justified, or encouraged. Therefore, most caring employees interact with needy students informally and refer them to community agencies if that is possible or necessary.

Without publicizing criminal activities in the greater community, college students and their parents are mostly unaware of circumstances which place residents in danger. This is especially true of families who come from rural environments and small towns far from urban influences. This city is not large, so parents do not expect urban types of violence to occur. Although instances of violence are less frequent than are found in a large city, this locality is not immune from criminal activity. These instances occur off college property and therefore the college has no legal obligation to warn or in any way take action that could prevent these circumstances.

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Young females living on their own are most vulnerable and the interviews supported that observation. Living with a group of friends had a different effect on safety issues. As an example, from a young female's perspective attempting to become more independent, the attention displayed by her male housemates was not always welcome. However, with three guys watching over her, she never was in much danger, unlike her counterparts living by themselves. She may have depended on this care, but she was still resentful that she even needed it.

Some students survive that first year and learn hard lessons about budgeting and setting appropriate priorities on their own. Some do not and have to quit. Becoming responsible about managing their money was extremely important to students. The first semester introduced a harsh reality to these students which their counterparts living at home did not confront. Most students did not expect living expenses to be so great. They sometimes committed payments to items not essential to their survival such as cable television, furniture items, stereo equipment, and vehicles requiring extra insurance and upkeep. Students also expected financial aid money to be allotted at their request, on time, without any complication. This unrealistic expectation was dispelled in the first semester so that in subsequent terms, if they survived, students became more savvy. For the most part, students coming from greater distances are poor, living very close to the edge of their resources. Unexpected expenses or delays of receiving income can be devastating to them.

Compared to students living nearby with their families, these students must grow up quickly. Students relate many stories of overcoming obstacles, but not always without some cost, pain, and growth. One student told me that she came to this city without a car, little money, and completely alone. Her story emphasizes the plight students encounter when attending this institution. The stories about finding

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apartments vary greatly. Some students have a relatively easy task, some never quite find a place that works for them.

Perhaps the crux of the problem for these students is that their parents don't understand the pressure and commitment a college education demands and can't prepare them or help them with these issues. When parents were called for their views on this experience, they were unwilling to respond or offer opinions. This reticence is difficult to explain, but could be attributed to the fact that an administrator from the college was inquiring about their child's perceived failure, or that phone interviews are unpopular because of the increasing pressures of phone solicitations. Each of the attempts to contact parents was uncomfortable, awkward, and abrupt. A decision was made not to continue this element of information gathering in order to distance the institution and this study from misunderstandings or perceived invasions of privacy.

Even students who ended up leaving after the first semester or half way through it had experiences which were positive for them. Most were unaware that the college could have helped them with services already provided such as tutoring, academic counseling, career exploration, and other established services. They did not interact with the college in any way beyond their classroom experiences. This was apparent in conversations with those students who stopped out, regardless of the primary reasons they gave for quitting.

Employees who are in consistent contact with young students living on their own are of the opinion that the college needs to take more responsibility to enhance their chance of success. These students, often on lists of probation, suspension, or dismissal need extra support systems. Unfortunately, they do not stay at the institution long enough to alert administrators to the problems they are experiencing.

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They leave the institution before seeking the assistance which might have saved their college education.

Community colleges in states which have incomplete systems end up serving a greater region than they were originally intended to serve (Gibson-Benninger, 1997). Community colleges in this state do not include any provision in any mission statements to provide student housing or services toward residency support. Unlike their four year counterparts, there is more incentive not to provide these services. The effects of this phenomenon were evident through employee interviews. Students did not express concern because they were unaware of issues outside their personal struggle. Employees, however, were very vocal and expressed frustration in regards to this matter.

Community colleges in this state are rewarded financially only by increasing enrollments.. The state system chartered only half of the community colleges it intended. Students living in unserved counties wanting an associates degree or low cost tuition must commute a great distance or move into the college area. The college scrutinized in this study continues to expand its attendance region. It provided service to two new counties this past year and is negotiating for others. Administrators are planning to visit other counties at greater distances from the central campus. Increasing recruiting of students from greater distances will intensity the problems identified by this study. The college has made little effort to retain these students once they arrive. There are no official policies toward these students as admitted by the dean of students, no personal counseling available, no peer counseling or mentoring, and little assistance with housing or community relations. These students, essentially, must survive on their own.

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Context

Community colleges may not have to follow policies which adhere to strict in loco parentis, but there is a responsibility to fulfill a social contract to students and the greater region being served. Although control of student behavior is no longer a precept of these institutions, providing an environment that is safe and encourages learning is. Acknowledging that the environment may include areas outside the campus is not a common area for community colleges, but there are students who need assistance with that environment. By ignoring the effects these environments have on student learning, the college forfeits student success in ways that can be preventable at minimal cost and liability. In exploring ways to assist these students, it is possible to not only reduce attrition rates for this population, but to enhance the potential for success for these students and improve relations with the local community.

Students expressed needs which coincided directly with the hierarchy of needs espoused by Maslow (1966). Food, shelter, and sleep were all concerns expressed by students. These physiological needs were expressed by all students, and sometimes the lack of attention to them resulted in illness and poor academic performance. Safety issues were raised most often by females, but were probably also an issue for males living alone. Although this city has a population of only 40,000, it is a more urban environment than they were accustomed. To belong and be accepted is not only a well defined need of all human beings, it is important to survival to a lonely adolescent in a new social environment. Students expressed deep felt relief when they were finally accepted by some group, whether it was within a class or a student organization. Students living with a group of friends from high school had less of a need to belong, but did not want to be identified as being different from the established norm either. Esteem needs, although not as acute as the other needs, play a large part in the confidence these students need to take risks. "Similarly, a student who feels like a second-class citizen would most likely not seek out within the campus community the kinds of risk-taking experiences that lead to personal growth" (Jacoby, 1989, p. 36). Without confidence, students will not seek assistance even when it is made readily available, they do not feel worthy enough to deserve help. The top level of need is self actualization, the development of a person's full potential. Despite the best efforts by a professor or counselor, if students are struggling with hygiene needs, they cannot put much effort into higher tasks.

Not all community college students enter at the same maturity or developmental level. There are vast differences in age, competence, academic skill, and background. Even at the same college, students of similar age have different needs according to their development. Chickering described how environment can influence development of college students toward greater competence, clearer purpose, and integrity to name a few. Colleges have little obligation toward these students outside the classroom, but do have responsibility to provide constructive environments for students (1981).

Community colleges cannot ignore influences outside the classroom and beyond on their students. Not only do some of these conditions described here inhibit healthy development, some conditions are destructive and drive students away from higher education altogether. Poor grades and abrupt decisions to leave the institution are only symptoms of a greater problem. Students going through great changes in their lives are confused and find it difficult to trust, especially someone in authority. When colleges do not provide trained counselors whose direction it is to help young

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students understand their own development, students become lost in themselves. Comments such as, "I wasn't ready for college or living on my own," reveal true developmental needs. Employees observe that the pressure and guilt of failing is extremely debilitating and that colleges never see these students again. Students are particularly vulnerable at the beginning, "I just didn't know anybody" admitted one student. These are needs that can be met with minimal impact on the college and yet return great dividends in student persistence and success.

Perry (1968) and Kohlberg (1981) also describe the developmental stages students go through on their journey to greater maturity and understanding of themselves and the world around them. How they relate to authority and accept responsibility is vastly influenced by their experiences at college. If this student population can survive the first semester and discover their own support system, they might develop into an accepted, mature person. Perry's description of a mature person is a person who has acquired personal values, respects others, and is always ready to learn. In order to achieve such a mature outlook people must live in an environment that permits growth and encourages exploration of self and multiple values. Most of the environments described by students in this study do not support such growth and exploration. Indeed, they inhibit growth by forcing a concentration on survival needs.

Kohlberg, although concentrating on the development of moral judgment, calls for educators to teach justice. This maturing process takes place not only in the classroom, but apart from teachers and the campus environment. Perhaps the college cannot reach beyond its physical boundary, but it can help students process life learning experiences through methods that are effective for the student while not threatening to its mission or resources. Community colleges accepting responsibility for the holistic development of students will succeed in lowering attrition and promoting student success. For these particular students the need is great and community colleges clearly have an opportunity to fulfill these needs in ways that benefit the college and the student.

Student affairs professional organizations have established guidelines for good practice within all institutions. Of the seven practices expressed on page nineteen, two directly speak to this issue. Number five states that student affairs professionals should, "provide leadership and efficient use of resources to help achieve the institution's mission and goals." Number seven says that student affairs professionals are responsible for, "Building supportive and inclusive communities." (ACPA/NASPA, 1997, p. 35) Student affairs professionals are the most logical administrators responsible for calling attention to issues that contribute to attrition and suggesting policies that alleviate such issues. Employees noted that no office is assigned responsibility in meeting those needs at this institution. In response, thirty-eight students have been identified as living in these conditions and the college loses half of them within the first year. Losing those students is costly in a number of ways, but losing them before they complete their program costs the college two to three full time tuition payments for each student lost. The number of students fitting this category is growing each year because recruitment to greater regions is expanding.

Recruiting students from distant areas is costly, both budgetary and potentially in reputation for the following reasons. First, additional costs are incurred through travel involved on the part of admissions recruiters and receptions for high school counselors from outlying areas. Second, the amount of time already spent in dealing with parents and students is substantially greater than other students the same age. Finally, the college's reputation can be damaged in two communities, the student's home town and the college town, if serious student problems reach the public media. In this state, the increase of these students is foreseeable. New community colleges will, most likely, not be built in the immediate future. Therefore, the problems these students bring are not going to diminish, but increase. Finding solutions may prevent student failure and damaging publicity in the future.

These stories revealed by students and employees direct attention toward ethical considerations on the part of the institution. Students coming from distant communities that make it difficult to commute to the campus have more obstacles to overcome than their counterparts who live closer. The college, obtaining evidence of student attrition and failure, should then provide services that assist them to overcome these obstacles, or discontinue their efforts to recruit from those regions. By continuing current practice, student failure will occur at rates higher than necessary. Beyond all other arguments to improve services, inviting students to an institution where only fifty percent of their peers will survive the first year is illogical, especially when prudent action is not being implemented.

Not only should services be provided to these students that increase the odds that they will succeed in attaining their academic goals, but the institution should be more honest with students and parents from the beginning. Students coming from these areas are, for the most part, the first of their immediate family to attend college. Admissions recruiters need to educate parents and potential students about the entire college experience, not just academic programs and campus activities. Housing, budgeting, security, health, and separation anxiety need to be addressed before a competent decision can be made. If it is known what major obstacles will be encountered, then the institution has an obligation to forewarn and help prepare students for them.

Recommendations

First, the college needs to examine policies, resources, and responsibilities in relating to traditional aged students from outlying regions living on their own in the local community. The proposed policy, plan of action, and supporting information needs to be coordinated and pursued by the student affairs department. Clearly there are needs of students not being met. As advocates representing these students to the greater college community, student affairs professionals need to examine and act upon this issue, providing leadership for better service.

Second, beginning with recruitment, all parents and prospective students should receive accurate information about the community, expected living expenses, college policy and responsibilities, and past student experiences. This can be packaged in a positive format, but there should be clear statements of what the college will and will not do for the student. Informed decisions and adequate preparations can then be made on behalf of the students so that some of the surprises experienced in the past can be minimized. Admissions counselors can then be more proactive in recruitment situations when asked about living conditions.

Third, upon acceptance and admission to the college, all students living outside an established local radius should be sent information about housing, living conditions, and estimated expenses. Mailings can be determined by home zipcodes or high school graduation codes which signify that the student will be coming from an inconvenient distance for commuting. At minimum, students and their families should receive a booklet describing the community with hints on living in an apartment, a map of the area, and a list of available housing. Ranges of expense detailed in categories of rent, utilities, furnishings, groceries, and entertainment should be included. A letter from an administrator assigned to this population and a letter from a student who had lived successfully in these conditions would be helpful. Not only is the information about the community important, but creating a human connection alleviates the potential for loneliness as described in the interviews. Written carefully, these items of information would inform incoming students without placing the college in any liability.

Fourth, a better orientation for these students was a resounding theme coming from employees and students. Specific sessions devoted to living in the area and living on their own can be lead by students who have lived in those conditions and a student affairs professional. These sessions need to be specifically tailored so that students are secure enough to attend, not identified as being different among a larger group of students. Students having little or no experience in how to compromise with others concerning stereo volume or refrigerator rights could have frank discussions about these issues before they become barriers. Perhaps joint parent-student orientations can be planned with separate information sessions for parent and student, even between male and female students. Students will be able to identify each other and be encouraged to form support groups among themselves.

Fifth, support groups established during orientation will need encouragement, institutional support, and purpose. Students have expressed that they do not want to be identified as being different or separate from their peers. Nevertheless, these groups might become successful if sophomores who live in apartments are the leaders and if they can truly fulfill the needs perceived by students. Loneliness was identified as a frequent reason for leaving. If only fifteen percent of the 1996-1997 students could be saved, the college could gain eighteen full semesters of attendance which were lost.

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Sixth, community relations can be improved through a town-gown committee or a representative group similar to committees more common to four year institutions. Community representatives can join with employees and students to promote activities that enhance relations and solve problems. This is an appropriate group for landlords and property owners to communicate problems and establish guidelines that both renters and tenants can abide. The college has the ability to promote healthy communication while remaining neutral through all discussion. Promoting student success is the institution's incentive for community involvement. The college could have no authority for lease agreements between student and landlord, student behavior off campus, or endorse any specific rental units, but they could encourage behaviors that benefit both parties. For instance, a list of questions students should ask landlords developed by this committee could help students find appropriate housing.

Finally, assign duties required to adequately meet the needs of this population to one person or office. Consistency of information and action will not take place at this campus until a central office is assigned this task. After all, students choose who and when they ask for help, no one can predict who the contact person may be to a particular student. Currently every employee, from custodial personnel to the president, interact with students who moved into the community. Students are exposed to a variety of responses to their questions, some of which are inaccurate or absurd. All employees need training to know how to react appropriately because these students can approach anyone. This issue requires one person to coordinate services that meets institutional policy in regards to traditional aged students living on their own in the local community.

Suggestions for Further Study

Suggestions For Further Study

Many issues were raised in the course of this investigation. Focusing on one small population increases curiosity about them, but also alerts the researcher to other issues, institutions, methodologies, and longitudinal considerations. Obviously there is a need to study a larger sample to improve the quality of information. Pasceralla is right to call for more research about community colleges and the students who attend them (1997). There is much to learn, process, and act upon in these vibrant institutions.

Along with enlarging the sample, other participants such as landlords, parents, and other traditional age students, would enhance the findings through various perspectives. Also, this study was conducted by a participant/observer which created obstacles that might have been overcome by an outside researcher not employed by the college. A nonparticipant could have encouraged more openness among students and parents. The study could also be improved by an equal comparison of local young students living with family and young students living on their own apart from family. By concentrating this study on one population, the findings could be skewed and information misinterpreted by observing one group of students. Finally, this study should be continued. Following these particular students as their lives progress as well as studying students entering the college in future years will enhance our understanding of how this college and surrounding community influence young student development.

Other methodologies would increase the accuracy of these perceptions. Questionnaires distributed randomly among all traditional age students at various institutions would greatly enhance our understanding of their needs. However, without open ended interviews, complex or hidden issues may be missed. The combination of both would enhance our understanding of obstacles that hinder student success and possible solutions toward eliminating them. Attrition rates among all traditional age students were quite high in comparison to the general student population, which include all age groups. Why that rate is so high is a matter of concern and subject for further study. Separating successful transfer students from students who drop out will reduce attrition rates, but to what extent is unknown at this institution.

Comparing students in the same traditional age group to those that move out of their family home and those that continue living there for two years would be a viable study. Does living at home inhibit the maturation process? Do students who live on their own mature faster and in what specific ways are they maturing? Are young students, who attend community colleges without motivation, only going to please a parent? Is this just a normal development for these students? Would some students quit anyway whether they attend college, job, or military,? If the answer is yes to the last question, then nothing the institution does will make a positive difference to some students.

A comparison of residence systems in higher education is also a possibility. There was inconclusive research on the European model of student housing for higher education. In Europe, many established universities typically do not have residence halls on campus but encourage students to live in the community. Townspeople surrounding the institution have achieved a symbiotic relationship with the university and its students. Local people accept the additional income students bring in return for an environment that permits freedom, but set with expectations and a support system. The college is then not liable for housing, but its students have safe living conditions. A study that compares this scenario with the American college system of residence halls and support systems would be of interest to institutions deciding policy on student housing.

A national survey of community colleges regarding residence issues for traditional age students is necessary to correlate with attrition rates at those institutions. If attrition rates are lower for these students where services are provided or convenient housing is available, then those services and/or housing could be recommended to enhance retention of students. The information currently available examines only the number of colleges that offer housing as opposed to those who do not. There is nothing detailing services that are offered, if housing that is offered is adequate for the population, or how decisions to offer housing are made. For instance, one rural community college in New York offers on-campus housing only to young women, all others must live on their own in the community. Is this adequate for that population? How was that configuration determined, and does that college evaluate its decision? Another community college in Maryland recently decided to build a residence hall for out of town students. Why was this decision made and how did the residence hall change student experiences there?

The long term effects that services, housing, or the lack thereof have on students should be explored. For students who attain their academic goals, were these issues vital to their success? If asked five years after graduation, would students admit they were in need of such services? Is this important enough to require all community colleges to provide, or is there a formula that could analyze a student body accurately to determine what services and level of service should be provided?

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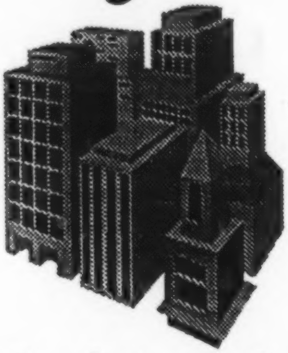
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Student Living in Collegetown



For C4 Students moving into the Collegetown Area

STUDENTS LIVING IN COLLEGETOWN

We hope this booklet helps you find your way around Collegetown. It includes almost every service, store, and person to help you through situations are common to most students who have moved into the Collegetown area.

Please keep this booklet and use it often. It will help you.

Also, Collegetown is a growing changing city. Although we have made every effort to provide up-to-date information, some things might change. You can help by letting the Office of Student Life know of these changes or improvements to this booklet.

Good luck!
Director of Student Life

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APPENDIX B
Student Interview

This is one example of the ten interviews with students.

Researcher:
I'm trying to get the full story from the beginning of your college to where you are now. I'll start by asking some basic questions, just about yourself and then get into more deeper questions.
How old are you?

Student:
I'm nineteen years old, came here as an eighteen year old. I came to this college directly from high school. Native to my town ever since I was six months old. I got home from the hospital and that is where I have been ever since. It's about a forty-five minute drive from here. A little too hard to commute.

Researcher:
Would you describe your family to me?

Student:
My parents are together, I have three brothers and one sister, and I have seven nieces and nephews. I'm the first one to go to college. My parents did not go to college. My Father earned his GED five years ago because he had to drop out of school because my grandpa died. My mother has a high school diploma.

Researcher:
How did you come to the community college?

Student:
Well, basically my guidance counselor said this is a very good nursing school and I wanted to go be a nurse. It was between here and a state university. I chose this because it has everything and he swore by the school.

Researcher:
What was the advice that the guidance counselor gave you?

Student:
I used to get good grades in high school, although got in wrong crowd near the end.
I had to choose between a state university and the community college for Nursing, and I was influenced heavily by high school guidance counselor.
My counselor assisted me by helping get a list of apartments in Collegetown.
I came to Collegetown without a car, little money, and completely alone.
I needed to find an inexpensive apartment, fairly safe, near to the bus line.
Found an apartment on the second call, Dad helped find it. I have a good landlord.
$270 all inclusive for furnished 3 room, everything but phone and cable.
Wayne Walls was excellent as a landlord, real nice about late rent or repairs.
And, it was only two blocks from Main Street.

Researcher:
What were the main challenges for first 3 weeks?

Student:
Finding things and getting to know people were the two main challenges.
I didn't know anyone when I came here. Did not know where anything was. I had to learn the bus schedule. God, my phone bill was high that month. I went home every weekend until I got to know some people.
The Laundromat was in the basement. Finding groceries and food was difficult because I wasn't near any thing. I had to ride the bus or find someone with a car to take me.
I really didn't eat very good for a long time. I ate real good on weekends when I went home and brought lots of leftovers with me. I just didn't know anybody.
I broke through when I started school. I was here for a month by myself before school started. Before that I finally got brave enough to introduce myself to my next door neighbor and now she looks out for me, she's like a mother to me.
When I started school, I found friends. One friend in my nursing class, just as alone as me, said he met some people and would I like to come down to meet them. I said yeah. So I did and made a whole bunch of friends. That helped alot.
The Gaming Guild accepted me. I never felt accepted in Collegetown until then. I felt alone. But then I found a whole group of people and we all had a common interest. People think negatively when they hear about this group, but there is nothing negative about gaming...it just explores the mind. Granted, some take it too far, but still,
I felt accepted for once. They really showed me around Collegetown. A friend helped me find work. They took me places. I got out of that shy rut I was in. I did not know anybody and did not know how to act by myself.
My grades in high school were really good, I was on the principle's list and honor role. I started out being quiet, but got into the wrong crowd a little bit. But when I got down here I started over...being my quiet self. If you don't bother me, I won't bother you.

Researcher:
What were the attitudes of community members toward you, a person from out of town?

Student:
Some treated me really good, they went out of their way to help me find things. Others were like stuck on themselves, like they were better than you because you weren't around here...you were foreign to them. So I got an equal balance of both.

Researcher:
Can you give me any examples?

Student:
I don't know My neighbor really helped me out. I told her I was Catholic and did not know where to go. She literally got me in the car and took me where I needed to go. I asked where a dentist was on main street to 3 0r 4 people, but no one would answer. All they said was I don't know. I had to go in to a business to find out.

Researcher:
Do you every feel in danger or unsafe?

Student:
Oh yeah...living by myself, you can't believe how many times I go to make sure my door is locked. I have two doors of my apartment that I checked constantly.
I live on the top floor so I know that people can't go up my window or anything.
And now I got my car down here, I have to park a little ways from my apartment and I sometimes, with my work, I have to leave at night. With people hanging around it sometimes is unsafe. There is supposed to be a curfew, but it isn't followed. I was terrified.
One time there was a group of guys by my car and there was no way I was going to go out there. So I called work and told them I was going to be a little late and asked my other neighbor to walk me out. He's an Army recruiter and he walked me out because I wouldn't walk out....I finally got brave enough to ask for help, I did not want to, just wanted to be alone, but I did get help.

Researcher:
Were there any problems that hindered your coursework?

Student:
Well, yes...the biggest problem were the friends I made. They like to pop in because I had my own apartment and they didn't they like to pop in all the time. And it got to the point that like I said your my friends, but don't come out. I even locked the door and didn't let them come in. They got mad at me, but they got over it. I finally put my foot down and told them I have work to do, no you cannot come over. That was my biggest problem. I used to have to stay up until after they left and then do my work. They just didn't know when to leave.

Researcher:
What was Collegetown like in the weekends?

Student:
Weekends really weren't a problem, I either went home or was so busy with friends that I was only in the apartment time enough to sleep.

Researcher:
Did any of your friends, similar to you, have any problems?

Student:
I met other students in the same situation as I was. There was one student in the same apartment building as me. He lived on the other side, so that helped me make friends of the people over there.
You don't want to admit that you live by yourself.
I had to get to know these guys alot before I ever told them. When I first came down here there was other people, even people from my own school, but I never see them. Sometimes at the bookstore or whatever, but on normal, we never see each others. I never considered having them as a roommate.

Living with friends I would worry about...they want to do things and I want to study, too many conflicts. You lose friends that way.
I like living alone and would not have a roommate.

Researcher:
Did the college or employees help in any way?

Student:
Well actually you helped me alot because you were always around and if I needed anything or to talk to you were always good about that. You and one of the counselors helped by being there for me and letting me talk through problems. The college did not provide services, but it was nice to know that someone was there to listen.

Researcher:
How did college employees treat you, did any others help you?

Student:
None of the employees or professors treated me any differently than anyone else. Of course, I already said that I didn't tell many people that I was not from around here.

Researcher:
Are there any services the college could provide or improve to better serve students like yourself?

Student:
Actually...the Financial Aid. It takes forever to get help. I know I was trying to get things settled for a whole year to finally get my grant stuff to get approved. Thank God I got a scholarship, it took forever to get my grant money, that finally came. I mean I understand they have to make sure the student is going to come and everything, but we had to wait a month to a month and a half before we even got any money in. Thank God I had the scholarship or I would have really been messed up. Because I not only had school bills, I had home bills. I had rent and phone bills along with books and everything else. My scholarship only covered books and tuition, nothing else. It was a month and a half before any other money came in. It was really slow, the first check came in late, then the next check came in a couple of weeks later. Yep, that got really bad. I learned how to save a penny real good. But that's basically the biggest problem I had.
The bus tokens and the bus helped me a lot. I would not have been able to attend the college without it.
Winters really did get bad. I always started out for class early. Sometimes I got to the college an hour early, but I didn't care. I just made sure that I was here on time. Had to improvise a little bit. But once I started making friends, they would pick me up and it got a lot easier.
Now I have my car, I got it the end of the second semester. I actually won it through the Vo-Tech I was attending, but my parents car broke down and they couldn't get to work, so I let them use mine since I had transportation down here. But they got theirs fixed and I have mine back. That helped me find a job, but now I have gas, repairs, and car insurance.

Researcher:
What have you learned this past year?

Student:
The biggest thing I learned in this last year is asking for help, not being ashamed of asking for help.
Also, putting your foot down when things are not the way you have it planned to put your foot down...to say hey, this is not the way I have it worked out. To be able to say no and not let your friends, family, or other people run your life for you. This is my life, let me do it.
That was my biggest thing...actually sticking up for myself. I got in the habit of letting my friends and my family run my life. I finally said nah, this is not going to be the way it is. I'm going to set goals and I am going to meet them.
I have matured more in this last year by living on my own than my friend who are still living at home.
They don't know how to manage their money. They say, I have money...let's go. But I can't do that. I'd love to, but not until I get a paycheck. I have to save this for that and can't dip into that account or else I won't be able to live for a month.
It was hard, this last year, but I managed.
My guidance counselor helped me immensely. I did not have enough money to take the test for nursing, so he paid for it, he believed in me that much.

Researcher:
Thank you very much for the time you spent with my on this. Your comments will really help, not only with this study, but in serving students better who are like you.

APPENDIX C

Employee Interview

This is one example of the six interviews with employees.

Secretary in Admissions

Researcher:
Describe the students you know who are living on their own.

Employee:
Students are either frightened or overly confident, wanting to get away from home. When groups come down, they seem to have the most problems when they live together. They become unhappy with each other.
Parents are the most upset. First of all they have to find a room. They don't realize that. None has ever come back and said they couldn't come to school because they couldn't find a room someplace. They thought the college should take more of a part in finding something for them.
We try to do what we can by providing maps and showing them locations.
We give them the booklets, and then recommend the newspaper listings.
Also I tell them to get an apartment, they might not be thrilled about it, but the student can make friends and can find something better later.

Researcher:
What kinds of situations or problems, outside the classroom, do these students come up against?

Employee:
Roommate problems are the most common. Not paying their share of the rent, etc.
Prices of the apartments vary greatly.
Busses are available, but they don't run in the evenings and can't take an evening class.

Researcher:
Have you ever been asked to give them assistance?

Employee:
They ask me for roommates, which is really tricky. We're not matchmakers. I ask their permission to offer their names to others who are interested and then it is up to them.
When these students get sick, there is no one to tell them what to do.
They will stop in and say they aren't feeling well and there isn't much I can do.
I do encourage them to call their parents or find a doctor that will see them.
They do come and see me for a variety of reasons and I try to help them when I can.
There are problems with landlords, but I just refer to them to your office. Used to be there was no one to refer them to .
I have lent money out, but only to a student I absolutely know personally, I don't do that often.

Researcher:
Do you know of other colleges like ours that provide any services to these student?

Employee:
I have never read about a college that offered services.
One university site doesn't have dorms, but they gave assistance and a map to help find something.
Students have a hard time budgeting their time. They have more responsibility.
When a stove or furnace breaks down, things don't get fixed in a timely manner like in a dorm. Where things are more or less done for you.
So I think they have alot more things that distract them from their studies.
Social activities interfere and students don't know how to handle that.
Really out their on their own.
Some do well, some don't. Adjusting socially is a real problem. Sexual activity, parties, etc.
There were two nursing students from a small town eighty miles from here who always went home on the weekends. There was a man who made advances on them all the time. In fact, he was the landlord and really treated them horribly. Magically, his name never appeared on the apartment list in the future. We really didn't do any more than that and those girls were lucky.
There are apartments built within walking distance of the college and many college students rented there because it was so convenient. However they refuse to be listed on the apartment list because a group of basketball students just trashed an apartment, something like $5,000 worth of damage. They destroyed the possibility of students ever renting there again.
It really effects public relations for the college.
There was another party that had over 150 people show up that made the news.
People in the community remember that kind of thing for a long time.
Collegetown residents resent out of county students coming into this community.
Mostly older people don't like our tax dollars going out for these reasons.
If we had something like a block building nearby it would be great for our students.
There were some influential men interested in renovating an old building for apartments for our students. But it fell through for some reason and it was a shame that opportunity was lost.
I've been doing housing for 10 years that there hasn't been anything so bad that it hasn't been handled by you or the Dean. We've been lucky.
Landlords sometimes specify that they only want female or male. We list as prefer. It's the only way to do that.

APPENDIX D

TO: Dean of Students
Dean of Instruction
Retention Committee
State Auditor Representative

FROM: Financial Aid Director

DATE: October 3, 1996

SUBJECT: 1995-1996 Retention Figures for This Institution

3204	100%	Students Enrolled in the Fall.1995 Term (As of Week Three, After Withdrawal)
174	5.4%	Students Enrolled at census date who did not finish Fall 1995
3030	94.6%	Students Completing Fall 1995 Term
35	1.1%	Students (of 3030) who identified an intent to transfer
82	2.7%	Students (of 3030) who graduated in December 1995
2183		Fall Students enrolled at start of Spring term (68% of Fall Starters; 72% of Fall Finishers)
2091		Fall Students completing Spring term (68% of Fall Starters; 69% of Fall Finishers)

Spring Finishers 2091
Federal Attrition Rate 33.02 % = (Fall Starters - Fall Graduates)= (3204 -
82)

APPENDIX E

TO: Dean of Students
Dean of Instruction
Retention Committee
State Auditor Representative

FROM: Financial Aid Director

DATE: October 10, 1997

SUBJECT: 1996-1997 Retention Figures for This Institution

3144	100%	Students Enrolled in the Fall 1996 Term (As of Week Three, After Withdrawal)
166	5.4%	Students Enrolled at census date who did not finish Fall 1996
2978	94.6%	Students Completing Fall 1996 Term
27	1.1%	Students (of 3030) who identified an intent to transfer
86	2.7%	Students (of 3030) who graduated in December 1996
2134		Fall Students enrolled at start of Spring term (68% of Fall Starters; 72% of Fall Finishers)
2064		Fall Students completing Spring term (68% of Fall Starters; 69% of Fall Finishers)

$$\text{Federal Attrition Rate } 32.5\,\% = \frac{\text{Spring Finishers}}{(\text{Fall Starters - Fall Graduates})} = \frac{2064}{(3144 - 86)}$$

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